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Walter S. Hinchman

William of Normandy

WILLIAM OF NORMANDY

A CHRONICLE-PLAY

BY

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TO MY MOTHER

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

WILLIAM I., *King of England aud Duke of Normandy.*
ROBERT "CURTHOSE," } *His sons.*
WILLIAM "RUFUS," } *His sons.*
HENRY "BEAUCLERC," } *His sons.*
ODO, *William's half-brother, Bishop of Bayeux and Earl of Kent.*
LANFRANC, *Archbishop of Canterbury.*
GILBERT MAMINOT, *William's physician, Bishop of Lisieux.*
ANSELM, *Abbot of Bec.*
WALTER GIFFARD, *Earl of Buckingham.*
ROGER OF MONTGOMERY, *Earl of Shrewsbury.*
HENRY BEAUMONT, *Earl of Warwick.*
RALF DE WADER, *Earl of Norfolk, leader in the revolt of* 1075.
ROBERT OF BELESME, *son to Shrewsbury.* } *In Robert's revolt,* 1077-1078.
IVO TAILLEBOIS, *Count of Spalding.* } *In Robert's revolt,* 1077-1078.
GILBERT CLARE, *a Norman baron.* } *In Robert's revolt,* 1077-1078.
ROBERT MOWBRAY, *a Norman baron.* } *In Robert's revolt,* 1077-1078.
RENARD, *a Norman jongleur.*
GASTON, *a Norman servant.*

HEREWARD THE WAKE, *leader of the last English revolt,* 1071.
GWENOCH, *an English knight.*
THURKILL, *a Danish freeman, in Hereward's service.*
HAROLD, *an English freeman.*
OSRIC, *an English gleeman.*

MATILDA, *queen to William I.*
CONSTANCE, *their daughter.*
TORFRIDA, *wife to Hereward.*

Monks, soldiers, Norman gentlemen, clerk, attendants.

William of Normandy

ACT I.

Scene 1.

Time: March, 1071; early morning.

Large hall in William's castle at Winchester. Doors R and L.

Odo, Warwick, Norfolk, Ivo, Clare. All are dressed as for a hunt.

Clare. Well met, Lord Bishop Odo; 'tis a grace
That thou as good an earl as bishop art,
Else should we lack thy grace at festivals.

Odo. I know how some young priests look leanly on
When feasts are forward, but I count it base
To be but one thing—were that thing a king!
A bishop should know how, when there is cause,
To wield his battle-axe or ride at hunt.

Clare. Or make the feast ring with a merry quip.

Warwick. That hast thou done, Lord Bishop! I recall

Not better thy shrewd blows on Senlac field
Than thy shrewd jesting at last Christmas feast.
It's in the blood! Thy royal brother finds
His kingship all too narrow, so he holds
The church, the hunt, and war in vassalage;
Where'er he goes he rules—right royal that!
So thou, my lord, by witness of thy words,
Canst not object if William guides thy see.

[*Warwick laughs, then pauses to see how Odo takes his jest.*

Odo (*with pious sarcasm*). The question, Henry Beaumont! He's my king!
But where stays Walter, Earl of Buckingham?

Norfolk. See, there he comes;—and, by my faith, in mail!

Enter Buckingham rapidly, L.

Warwick. What, Buckingham! in mail? Is not to-day
To be made signal by a gentler garb?

Buckingham. Ay, in mail! and like to be for days.
Where is the king?

Warwick. He pauses with the queen.
The hunt stays but for him, whom we await.

Odo. Nay, Buckingham, we too have left the ladies,
To exercise ourselves against the boar;

But so accoutred in blank, solemn steel,
With hasty steps and harsh, unfestal voice,
We hardly thought to be. The boar that range
In Hampshire here are not so terrible,
I promise, but a man of thy stout heart
May come off safely in plain hunting-gear.
[*Several laugh.*

Buckingham (*savagely*). Think'st thou that Giffard is afeard of boars!

Odo. Forbid! Yet why then thus in linkèd mail?

Norfolk. Yes, why in mail, Sir Earl?

Buckingham (*turning to Norfolk*). Why, boy? Because the Saxon wolves, half starved,
Have found their fens a grewsome place to keep.
Morkere the leal, Morkere the faithful friend,
Hath joined in league with that bold Hereward,
And daily in some skirmish or by night
In raid they slaughter Norman fighting-men.
How now, young Norfolk, is it to thy taste
To lead fair Emma in a suit of mail?
(*Touching Norfolk's finery*) These ribbons are not proof 'gainst Saxon bows.

Norfolk. What madness are you at? This is the day
Of hunt; to-night at the great feast——

Buckingham. What! Talk
Of hunt when there is shout of war? The madness,

Good my Earl, sits otherwise than here.

Clare. But, Giffard, one might think that thou wert strange,

Just landed on these shores, to question thus.
This morning certes make we merry chase.

Buckingham. Make we? Who's *we*, my lord?

Clare. The king, forsooth!

Buckingham. The king? Not William, Duke of Normandy;

Not that same duke, that only stripling boy,
Who rode victorious at Varaville,
Who drove a routed field at Val-es-dunes,
Who cut a path for Normans up the hill
Where Harold rallied with his desperate carles.
Not unlike Harold is this Hereward,—
Or more resembling him of Noroway,
Hardraade called, flat-visaged, broad of back,
Who killed a lion with his naked hands,
(As Hereward himself the great white bear)—
A fearless leader, loved by all his men;
And William knows it. Ay, to-morrow morn
He'll hunt—not boars, but Saxon wolves.
I know him.

Ivo. Nay, he'll hunt alone unless
He promises good portion of the spoil.

Buckingham. Sir, you are liegeman sworn. When William bids

You needs must go—if you do honour oaths.
Ivo. Ay, sworn to service, not to slavery;
"The labourer is worthy of his hire."
Norfolk. But, Giffard, I protest. The king himself
Hath ordered this assemblage—here to be
A hunt, a feast,—whereat, thou art aware,
I shall renew request for royal favour
To grace my suit to Emma.
(*Darkly, to Buckingham alone*) Thou dost know
'Twere better for the strength of baronage
If William favoured this, and knowest too
That never more auspicious hour befell
For my request.
(*To the whole company*) No word of warfare now.
Let Hereward plunder—'tis but Saxon homes
He devastates. Who cares? Another week
The king can punish him.
Buckingham. And Norman men
He kills! Who cares? In sooth, it bears a look
That Norfolk hath one thought. Well, bring thy maid;
'Twere shame to baulk thee now, to catch thee back,
Thy fingers on the dower! But bring thy maid
To Ely; she shall be the battle queen! (*Laughs.*)
Warwick. Here comes the king.

Enter R, William and Rufus, a boy of fourteen, both dressed for the hunt.

William (*cheerily*). Good morrow for the hunt!
(*A general falling back and obeisance.*)
Already met? What, have I kept you waiting?

Clare. Delay is sweet when it means sweet reward.

William (*laughing*). As ever, Gilbert, breaking fast with sweets!

Clare (*clapping Rufus patronisingly on the shoulder*). So ho! Sir Huntsman! Dost thou ride to-day?

Rufus (*bluntly*). Ahead of thee, I trow. I lay a wager
That I shall slay my boar ere thou art breathed.
[*General laughter.*

Warwick (*patting Rufus on the back*). I'll trust thee, boy!

William (*suddenly seeing Buckingham*). What Giffard! So in steel?

Norfolk (*coming forward*). My liege, hear not his panic words. 'Tis naught.

William. Not hear! By heaven, a man may talk; I'll hear!

Buckingham. My liege, the Saxon Hereward, now joined

By that ingrate, unfaithful Earl Morkere,
Is lately making bold to sally forth;
And, taking profit of an art of thine,
Is laying waste the country south from Ely.
Our Norman soldiers starve and fight at loss,
Our Saxon soldiers mutine and desert;—
My lord, take thought: give Hereward the force
That Harold had — and London town some night——

William. Incarnate God! Have they forgotten York?

(*To an attendant*) Here, fellow, fetch my mail.
My lords, this feast
Of merriment we do postpone. To-day
We march on Ely.

Norfolk. If my liege would hear,
If that a double suitor—to his king
And to that monarch's vassal—might be heard——

William (*laughing rudely*). If that he might be heard! He shall not be!
(*Sternly*) No, sir, let's hear of deeds in arms at Ely!
Let's hear thy battle-axe split Hereward's helm!
Let's hear, by heaven, of men! No, not a word!
Go, get thee into harness; and you, too,
Count Taillebois, Gilbert Clare, with all your men,
Follow Earl Norfolk to the bridge; there meet

Earl Buckingham, who forms our men for march.

[*Exeunt Norfolk, Buckingham, and Clare, L.*

(*To Rufus*) Go in, my boy, and tell the stable-grooms
The hunt is off.

Rufus. And may I go with you?

William. Not yet, my boy.

Rufus (*petulantly*). Oh, father! I am grown
As big as Warwick there!

William. Dost hear? Go in!

Rufus. Nay, I will go with you to Ely.—Pray!

William (*sternly*). Not yet, I say! Go to thy mother, child. [*Exit Rufus sulkily, R.*

My lord of Warwick, gather you your thegns
And wisely watch the midland shires, lest spread
This fever of the fen from east to west.

Warwick. My liege, our purpose shall be only peace. [*Exit L.*

[*William looks after him half-distrustfully; then, turning, suddenly sees Odo and Ivo in close conversation.*

William. What, Ivo! Lurking still? 'Tis time for haste;
Thy own domain is near enough for peril:
How if it feed some spreading Saxon fire?

Ivo. My lord, I have no lust to fight these churls,
And I'll make haste when there is talk of prize.
William. Since when didst thou turn sluggard-knave? No prize
Shall be for sluggards. Would'st thou hesitate?

[*William starts forward angrily, almost as if to strike him. Ivo stands impudently still.*

Ivo. By heaven, I'll not stand that! There is no king
Shall misname Ivo twice!
William (*thunders*). God's splendour, man!
Hold thy unbridled tongue, if thou would'st own
It yet an hour. Thou art my liege-man sworn,
And, by my blood, thou'lt follow Buckingham
And keep thy oath—or lose thy sullen head!
No word! No treason! Nor yet no delay!
And whether there be any rich rewards
For faithful knights,—that we will not disclose
Till our good pleasure. Thou, unfaithful found,
Shalt fight, by heaven, and not a rood of land
Shalt have as prize. No time for pardons now;
Go earn thy pardon with a willing sword,
And leave these grumblings to the kitchen-folk.

[*Exit Ivo sullenly, L.*

(*To Odo*) Brother, come quickly when I send for thee;
We shall have need to talk of government.

[*Exit R.*

[*Odo paces meditatively across the room, then starts when he hears the door L.*

Re-enter Ivo cautiously.

Ivo. Ah, bishop! Art thou quite alone?
Odo. Yes, quite:
And I am not the Bishop of Bayeux
If I have not already guessed thy purpose.
Ivo. Thou waitedst for me, Odo? Dost thou think
That William knows my purposes as thou?
Odo. I did not say I waited; merely knew
'Twas to thy taste to find me here alone.
Well, what's afoot? The man that gives the lie
To William when he will is not the man
To cringe thus out of deference to me.
Ivo (*more boldly*). Wise Odo! Thou know'st well my principle:
"The labourer is worthy of his hire!"
The king, good bishop, goes afield for gain,—
Let's not say plunder; 'tis a thing too large,
This kingdom which so satisfies his greed,
To be called ugly booty—yet 'tis gain.

And we? What compensation rich have we?
Perhaps, when Hereward's slain, the king will grant
The baser portions of a base morass
To pacify our need; to thee, let's say,
Some marsh called meadowland; to me perhaps
A stretch of dreary bog. I tell thee, Kent,
My wrath grows daily more unquenchable
When I do think what little difference
Of birth, of valour, of commanding power,
There rests between us and this duke, this king,
And then consider how he puts us off
With fens and bogs and petty baronies.

Odo. No difference, eh? Hast thou fought Val-es-dunes,
Bound Ponthieu, Maine, and Brittany in fee,
Won Senlac, ta'en the Scotsman in his home,
Made laws for a new nation, held the throne
Of Normandy a score of rebel years?

Ivo. I only ask my hire, a good, fair portion
Of fruitful Saxon land. That William now
Denied me, in a fit of angry spleen,
Is scarcely cause for Ivo to submit.

Odo. But thou *must* go, to fight for what thou hast!

Ivo. No danger that the Wake will ravage there;

Gilbert of Ghent and half of Norfolk's men
Protect the ground from Lincoln to the sea.
No, ere I go, I simply ask fair pay.
If fight for pay I must, I'll fight, good faith!
But, Odo, hark; I have a wiser plan.
Before the king takes horse he will consign,
If I mistake not, England's rule to thee.
Well, then, I know not Odo of Bayeux,—
And—Earl of Kent when 'tis convenient—
If he doth not—well—heed my principle:
"The labourer is worthy of his hire."

[*Ivo looks as suggestively as he can at Odo.*

Odo (*slightly vexed*). Think'st thou the steward of the King of England,
A bishop and an earl, can traffic so
In manors while his liege is at the wars?
Ivo, go fight and trust in William's grace;
Profane mine ears no longer with thy lusts.

Ivo. By cock, a bishop now! Kind, reverend priest,
If thou wilt thus deny thyself an earl,
I crave as gift thy merry land of Kent.
Come, Odo, come! Is't like that one so quick
To fathom vices hath himself ne'er wet
His pure, white fingers in the tasty broth?
Is necessary further hint to him
Who read my unspoke malice in my eye?

So be—I am a rogue ; and thou, my lord,
Art—one who comprehendest well a rogue.

Odo (*laughing good-naturedly*). Well, Ivo, if some plunderings chance to fall,
I'll not forget thy prayer.

Ivo. There speaks the earl !

Odo. And mark : the *earl* will not forget his hire ! [*Exit Ivo, L.*

[*Odo looks with a pitying smile at the door where Ivo has gone out.*

Poor Ivo ! One thing only, like the rest :
A valiant dagger-knave, a highway thief,
And seeking sorry service of intrigue !
Good friend, if thy blunt mind is set to rob
King William, thou hast need of subtler arts.
The mighty forestry that forms thy limbs,
Thy heart of oak, thy tough, yew-twisted arms
Have grown into thy head, displaced thy brains,
And flourished without flowers.
Pray God may I
Find better speed than Ivo found with me !

[*Exit R.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2.

Winchester. William's private Audience-chamber. Large fire-place R. Doors C and L.

William and Matilda. The king is in harness all but coif and helm.

Matilda. My lord, I pray success may crown your arms.

William. Yes, pray for me, my Maud; and in the camp
Before we go to battle, I will pray
For you at home.
Where are my little ones?

Matilda. There—Constance cometh now.

Enter Constance, C.

William. My daughter, go
Call Rufus in to say farewell.

Constance (*coming forward*). I'll go;
But, father, first a plea. Thou wast so stern
Just now to poor Earl Norfolk;—he is brave,
I'll warrant, and a lover true. Good father?

William. Yes, my child, the plea?

Constance. Why, father, that
Thou dost retract thy savage sternness to him

Matilda. The poor young earl is quite disconsolate;
He doth fear that for some hidden, stranger cause
Thou hast thy royal favour now withdrawn.
William (*aside*). So? Begging favours through the ladies' bower?
(*Laughing*) Is Norfolk sensitive as women are?
(*Taking Constance's hands*) Dost think, my dear, thy father is so stern?
Well, so perhaps he is.—Yet never so to thee—
Now grant him that?
Constance. With all my heart, my king.
William. Nay, what a speech, to call thy father king!
But come, my Constance, would'st thou have a knight,
When thou art grown, not valourous in war?
This battle is his God-sent tournament,
For after it he comes a proven warrior
To claim a lady worthy of his hand.
Go, wish him speed in arms, for speed in arms
Is surest way to speed him to his love.
Would Hereford give his sister to a coward
Who feasts before he fights? Go, wish him speed;—
My daughter should not wed a faint of heart.
But for my recent sternness,—know, my child,

'Tis never wisdom to hold parleyings
With disagreeing counts. The hunt was toward,
The courtiers all in gay comparison,
And words of doubt, of deference, my child,—
Wrath and an oath were worth a thousand such!

Constance. Good father, thanks. *Thy* daughter should have known.
I'll go call Rufus straight. [*Exit C.*

William. What letters, Maud?
What news of little Henry, our last prize?

Matilda. Better and better yet; the lad's so clever
That though he is but four they "scholar" him,
Call him a "clerk," "God's sage," and such fair names;
And of his yellow curls and comely face
They speak unstinted praise. I lately heard
From Anselm, who directs our Henry's growth.

William. Bravo! A pretty scholar? Then "Beauclerc"
We'll call him; 'tis a pretty fancy, Maud.

Matilda. Yea, passing pretty, good my lord, and worthy
His father's tongue; but Anselm wrote, "Beauclerc";
Thou must another find if thou'dst invent.

William. Nay, I'll not try; "Beauclerc" cannot be bettered.

And for Anselm was there, he spake it first;
Had William been in France the word were his!
But where's that red-head imp?—now half a man!

Matilda. I know not—Constance fetches him; let me send
A messenger. (*To attendant*) Go bid Prince William come. [*Exit Attendant, C.*

Ay, half a man! and stalwart, like his father!
Thou should'st have seen him, William, yesterday,
Striving to wield thy battle-axe, that none
But thee, not even Odo, swings. 'Twas brave!
The boy toiled so, and, out of breath with struggling,
Answered the Earl of Warwick's playful scoff,
About his puissant babyhood, thus bravely:
"Another year, Earl Warwick, I shall swing
This axe as only one can swing it now,
And then, good sir, beware of Rufus' wrath!"

William. So ho! A very lion's whelp!
(*Rather seriously.*) In him,
Matilda, see I our succession.
For as to Robert, that unnatural boy,—

Matilda. No, William, hold thy curse; he is our son,
Our bone and blood; I warrant he will mend.

William. My soul! 'Twere time he thought of it and did!

He swaggers over Normandy as though
He were already duke and squanders gold
Among his lavish followers as though
The gold were his. And I have heard it said
The upstart and unnatural boy doth call
Himself the duke, doth challenge me to war!
By heaven, Matilda, but he shall be whipped!

Matilda. My lord, my lord! Thy eldest son, thy heir!

William. Maud, that cross-natured boy hath wrung my heart.

Instead of following his father's fortunes,
Thus learning how to govern when I'm gone,
Instead of lending aid in my long strife
To settle here a lawless folk, t' ordain
A government of order and of right,
To strengthen God's foundation of the church,
Instead of promising support in age,—
The rascal looks upon my English reign
As so much banishment, as certain pledge
Of swift succession to the Norman throne.

Matilda. All men, my lord, are not made in one mould;

Robert has little of thy Norman blood.

William. And for that he has little I complain.

Matilda. 'Tis not his fault, poor boy. He is in truth

A Flemish count and understands the court.

William. Too well!

Matilda. The barons like him, wish him duke.

William. Because they wish a slave. They tire of me;

I am too certain to make good my oath;
I castigate too freely whisperers.
Matilda, thou at least canst comprehend:
These barons are a faithless, cut-throat brood;
All covet, and each siezes what he dares.
Would I could trust even my brother Odo!
He comes but now, to get instructions
To rule here in my stead — or should come now—
(*To an Attendant*) Go, see if Bishop Odo stays without. [*Exit Attendant, L.*
Would I could give him fullest power to act
And justice 'stead of avarice behold!

Enter Attendant, L.

Attendant. My liege, the Bishop Odo waits your will.

William. Let him come in. [*Exit Attendant.*
Matilda, go, I pray,
Go a moment and when I send thee word
See that the children come for their farewell.
[*Exit Matilda, C.*

Enter Odo and Attendant, L.

Attendant. The Bishop Odo, Earl of Kent, my liege.

William. Welcome, my brother. We must settle now
The conduct of the realm while I am gone.
Sit here. (*Motions to a chair.*)
(*To Attendant*) Withdraw a moment.
[*Exit Attendant, L.*
Now, my lord,
The time is short and we must to the point.
Into thy hands do I commit the rule;
But mark me well: no cruelty, no greed,
No theft of Saxon mead-steads as before
When on my voyage to France I gave thee charge.

Odo. The gross exaggeration of report,
My lord, hath done injustice to my rule.

William. If thou hadst dealt true justice, there'd not be
Injustice to exaggerate.

Odo. My lord,
The misdemeanours of Fitz-Osbern have,
By base perversion, fallen to my share.

William. No word against Fitz-Osbern! He is dead.
This time no doubt can be, if fault there be.

Therefore consider thine own conduct now:
If wise and gentle, as befits a priest,
Thy rule will ring of Saxon love, not hate.

Odo. My lord, it matters not how merciful,
How priestly one may be; these Saxon churls,
Thwart-natured, do call mercy but misrule.
Ere said, if Norman says it, 'tis condemned.
They curse thy institution of the laws,
Albeit laws that Edward founded here;
They curse thy necessary Domes-day Book,
As if their duties, there recorded clear,
Were sins and it the book of heaven's wrath;
They curse the curfew, wise provision
Against both fire and folly;—oh, my lord,
So anything be Norman, it is cursed!

William. And were I Saxon churl, I'd curse the laws
Did they mean robberies of ancient rights;
I'd curse the curfew did it mean but dark
Wherein the Earl of Kent might plunder me.
No, Odo, these plain Saxon folk are true;
And if not true to us, that is our fault.
But give them time to clear their sotted gaze,
To learn our nimble language, to unlearn
Distrust that grows of ignorance and fear,
They'll be, I warrant, honest, thrifty, true.
By heaven! Dost think I shattered Harold's crown

For plunder merely? For a bone to throw
To dog-toothed barons? Dost thou dream the Pope
My conquest consecrated that it might
Make Norman spits revolve more merrily?
Did those grave elders from the land's gemôt
Present me with the crown for Senlac fight
Or for my pledge to cherish Edward's law?
Now go, and construe strictly this my charge:
No land shall be confiscate till I come,
No matter what the offence; death-sentence, too,
Shall be prohibited.

Odo. My lord, I beg,
How can one, bound, drive an unruly horse?

William. If that his speech be clever there's a way.

Odo. My lord, I cannot but obey commands;
As ever, I shall strive to serve thee well.

[*Exit L.*

William (*going to door C. and calling*). Matilda! Children!

Enter in a moment Matilda, Rufus, and Constance.

So, unruly boy!
Where hast thou hidden? What prank is it now?

Matilda. Think, William! He was with the stable-grooms,

Threatening one fellow that he'd have his life
If the poor wretch did not give place to him
And let him ride as groom 'gainst Hereward.

Rufus. And so I would! Please, father, let me go;
I promise I can slay a Saxon churl.

William. No, boy. Next year, perhaps; this time stay here:
Ride to the hunt with Oswald; kill a boar,
And then we'll prate of Saxons. Kiss me now;
I have too long delayed. (*Kisses him.*) And thee, my girl. [*Kisses her.*
Farewell, Matilda. (*Kisses her.*) Speak for us in thy prayers. [*Exit L.*

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Time: One month later.

Place: Norman camp at Brandon, near Ely. A small room, the headquarters of Ivo Taillebois. About a table are seated Ivo, Gilbert Clare, and Norfolk. Wine-cups and maps are on the table. The drinking is very light.

Ivo. What make you with those plans? I know the roads
And know there is no other way but Aldreth.

Clare. We've failed there twice. If that's the only way,
We might as well resign the enterprize.

Ivo. Nay, man, a better way than map-marked ways
Is but to wait.

Norfolk. We cannot starve them out;
Thousands of fish abound in every back,
And marshfowl come for wishing.

Ivo. No—not starve;

But buy! (*with a laugh*) That is, sir knight, we seem to buy.
Hath it not been well done before? Why, think:
Swèyn with his brother Asbiorn is sailed,
Content to sit in Denmark; Edwin's dead;
Morkere was never much but faint-heart threats.
That leaves them but the Bishop Aethelwine,
Young Siward Barn, and Hereward the Wake.
Think how their strength hath dwindled. Yet a month
And we shall have it all.

Norfolk. Not while this Wake
Runs large. He is their animating heart;
'Tis he that we must capture.

Clare. Then, let's study
To seek oút by what way he may escape? (*Pores over map.*)

Ivo (*pushing his chair back*). I know the country, man, its leats and backs
From Cambridge east to Lindsey; he must go
North-west to Bruneswold—and go by boat.

Clare (*still poring over map*). Why not this way—along the Rech-dyke here?

Ivo. Why not? Why, man, our sentries stand so close
They hear each other breathe.

Clare. But by that path,

Along this dyke, did Hereward escape,
When like a potter peddling wares he came
And faced the king and spied out all our ways.

Norfolk. Ay, Ivo, — a marsh-bred eel is Hereward;
No man knows yet how he slipped off that day.

Ivo. More pox upon your maps! I know the land,
And if he must escape whate'er we do,
Why, what's the worth of plans? Let Hereward go;
I mean to catch that witch, his wife Torfrida,
Who by her incantations threw our host
Into the slough at Aldreth. Witch she is:
She learned her black arts from the dame Richilda,
The sorceress queen at Baldwin's Flemish court.

Norfolk. What, wilt thou wed a witch?

Ivo. Wed, man? Forbid!
Nay, Lucia's the lass I mean to wed,
Young Edwin's sister.

Norfolk. Edwin, sir, is dead.

Ivo. I had forgot. Well, then, it comes to this:
His sister while his head and he were one. (*Laughs feebly.*)
As for the witch Torfrida, she shall burn.

Clare. Torfrida burn! Think what the king will say!
'Twas thy false counsel, Ivo, to consult
That hooked-chinned hag of Brandon, yet the king

Felt sinful when she failed; to burn Torfrida,
A Christian lady who invoked the saints,
Were not to expiate a crime of which
The king already is ashamed.

Ivo. Bah, man!
He'll grant it soon enough. If not—why, then—

[*Ivo whistles significantly and twitches his beard.*

Norfolk. And so thou hast no thought of Mercian land?

Ivo. Thoughts had I, I will grant.

Clare. Here are the maps;
Set England in two baronies, my lords:
One barony for Norfolk, one for Ivo,—
The king and all his earls will take what's left.

[*Laughs heartily.*

But think you not 'twere wiser first of all
To carry out our purpose here to-night:
To hit upon some better point than Aldreth
For taking Ely Isle, to find the course
Which Hereward will follow if he flees?

Norfolk. Shrewd Clare! But what, in Ethelreda's name?

Clare. Yonder comes aged Buckingham—perchance
A fifth will find the quintessential clue.

Ivo. Nay, he has news; I read it in his stride.

Enter Buckingham, R.

Buckingham (*seeing map and concealing his haste*). Well, have you found a way?—Another witch?

Clare (*slyly*). Not yet, but Ivo yearneth for a witch;

Canst fetch us one?—a good, fire-famished witch!

Ivo (*trying to avoid the hit, at which all laugh*). Come, thou art bursting with thy messages;

What news? Speak, man.

Buckingham. Well, while unwearied counts

Invoke old witches to perform new tricks,—

In brief, good sirs, while you sit puzzling here——

Ivo. You have some silly plan?

Buckingham (*a little indulgently*). No plan, my child;

The thing's accomplished, done! Ely is ours!

Norfolk. Already?

Buckingham. Now—this night! And I am come

To bid you join the king. In Ely Church

He goes to mass to-night.

Ivo. (*springing up*). Impossible!

Then after Hereward! [*Ivo rushes out, R.*

Norfolk. And Hereward's witch!

[*Exit R.*

Clare. But, Buckingham, how came it?

Buckingham. Through the monks.
They saw a fatter future with the king.
Some little thunderings about the pope,
Some mention of their Rome-blest secular lord,
A mighty curse, a few small promises,
A bag of jingling gold,—ye guess the rest.

Clare. I thought these monks wore helm as well as cowl.

Buckingham. Just so. As knights they proved invincible,
And hence the king found it convenient
To test their spiritual strength. 'Twas almost crime:
Like lions erst, and now like timorous doves,
These very monks let William in to-night.

Clare. But has the king paid bribes?

Buckingham (*putting his finger by his nose*). Rest thou assured,
Before the game is quite played out, the king
Will see that all the gold is paid to him.
But come, the king must be in Ely now.

[*Exeunt R.*

CURTAIN.

Scene 2.

Time: Same.

Place: An open common on the isle of Ely. Trees and water, L; the minster of Ely just visible in the background, R. In the near background, at the edge of the trees, are a few rude shelters. Occasionally figures pass from one to another. In the middle foreground is a dying fire, where some supper has evidently been cooked. Around it sprawl a dozen or so men, among them Gwenoch, Thurkill, and Osric.

Soon after the curtain rises, lights begin to shine in two or three houses in the direction of Ely.

As the curtain rises a cheer goes up.

Gwenoch. Well sung, Osric! These were long nights, good Ost-Dane, without thy cheery song.

Thurkill. Ay, and cold nights without thee, good ale-skin.

[*He pats leathern bottle and takes a long drink. Passes bottle on to Osric, who, after drinking, hands it to Gwenoch.*

Gwenoch. Empty! Thou varlet scop! I'd prick

thee with my brain-biter but for the good ale that would be spilt out of thee and wasted.

Thurkill. Wasted within him unless he pay with a song.

Gwenoch. True spoken, Thurkill! Another song, Osric, to pay for leave to be a Kesteven hog.

Osric. Nay, an I sing you a brave, brave song, will you give me that leave—how is it the monks say?—in perpetuum, in æterum?

Gwenoch. Yea, an thou sing us a brave, brave song, thou may'st grunt to eternity.

Thurkill. Nay, he'll do that leastways, without leave!

Osric (*sings*). Shone like the sun
As it sets on the whale-path,
Brightly the shields
And the spears and the byrnies
Of Danemen the daring,
That drew from the North,
Gathered by Guthrum,
The gold-friend of man.
They rowed up the rivers,
Ravaged the mead-steads,
Plundered the people,
Put them to flight.
Spake Ælfred the Ætheling,

Able in speaking,
Brave in the battle,
In bearing full kingly,
"Are Wessex-men women
To weary of fighting?
Shall not the keen sword-edge,
The scather of warcrews,
That fought for our fathers,
Far-famed in our singing,
Smite now these Danemen,
Save us our hoards,
War on the heathen,
Win Winchester back?"

[*During the singing of the last few lines Hereward has come in from the R and stood listening. Osric stops abruptly, and the Saxons jump up as Hereward comes forward.*

Hereward. What! Sotted and bawling at this late hour!
For shame, Gwenoch!

Gwenoch (*a little surly*). Come, Master Hereward,
'Tis not ten years since I was of thy gang,
When we stole Peter's pence and promised Herluin
To come again and burn the Golden Borough.
Hast thou forgotten our good fellowship?
Come, taste some musty ale.

Hereward. Nay, Gwenoch, peace.
'Twere well to think of other things to-night.
But if, as seems, you will not follow us,
Why, then, drink here. We are free Englishmen,
Free knights, to choose what path we like. Or go
And join the traitor monks if you think best.

Thurkill (*taking up a battle-axe*). What traitor monks?

Hereward. No need for that just yet.

Thurkill. There's need if any threaten to desert.
What are these traitor monks?

Hereward. Alas! I fear
The monks have sold themselves, salving their sin
By precious argument, have bartered all,—
You, Gwenoch, Siward, me, and Ely town.

Gwenoch. What force can overcome King William's guile?
Twice did we see him fail at Aldreth marsh;
But what are thousand failures to a man
That sets his heart to win!

Thurkill. Stark man he is,
And cruel. O my lord, never yield to him.

Gwenoch. What can we do but yield?

Hereward. Yield? Never, man!
No, Gwenoch; that were niddering! Morkere
Is gone, and Edwin is foredone to death;
King Sweyn hath been bought off, and Æthelwine

Sits in his chamber, moaning piteously,
And mumbling Latin jargon—which will say:
"I, bishop, though bound by no secular law,
Must well consider what the pope may do—
That is, what William says the pope may do—
Which means, were it not safer for my life
To join the monks and welcome William in?"
Bah! niddering all! Each craven like the rest!
So, Gwenoch, art thou next? Art niddering?

Gwenoch. What can we do, my lord?

Hereward. Go arm; ere dawn
We shall have need to fight.

[*Confusion while they get their arms.*

Enter Torfrida hastily, R.

Torfrida. My lord, the French!
The king is here in Ely! All is lost!

Hereward. Not yet these English lives.

Torfrida. We can but fly.
Oh, fly! Think of the child! Escape!
Gilbert of Clare came rudely in—the monks,
Curst traitors, sat at their late repast—I listened
At the door—"Come, Saxon dogs," he shouted;
"up!
The king is in the minster." The sack begins—
See there! (*Pointing towards Ely.*)

Hereward. Let's get the women safely out.

To stay were but to offer them as game
For French brutality. Off to the marsh;
We can escape to Bruneswold, and then—
What say you to the good greenwood?

Gwenoch. My lord,
'Tis said the king, to keep some frightful oath,
Will cripple all his captives.

Torfrida. Oh, then, speed!
Gwenoch, surrender were far worse than flight.

Hereward. Well spoken, love. Make ready, men, for flight.
Thurkill and Gwenoch, bring the women down.

[*Exeunt all but Hereward and Torfrida.*

Hast thou the child in safety?

Torfrida. Yea, my lord;
There by that tree, in trusty Gytha's arms.

Hereward. Come, love, to the boat.

[*Takes the child in his arms and looks back fondly at the burning town.*

There is no other way!

CURTAIN.

Scene 3.

Time: Two days later than Scene 2.

Place: Room in the abbey of Ely. William seated in the abbot's chair on a dais at one end. On his right, standing, Ivo Taillebois, Norfolk, Buckingham, and Clare. Before him stand manacled twelve Saxons, among them Thurkill, in the charge of four Norman men-at-arms.

William. Are these the last?
Buckingham. The last that openly,
As to rebellion pledged, withstood our arms;
But there are yet some hundreds who defied,
While still the gates were closed, the royal power.
William. Those we'll examine later.
(*Sternly, to the Saxons*) Saxon men,
Ye know no doubt what happened to your kin;
Ye knew no doubt or ever ye rebelled
What course would come, as certain as the sun.
Can any of you give some small excuse
Why ye should thus have served an outlawed man
And mocked your sovereign power?
Thurkill (*proudly*). We knew no right
Save that thou took'st by guile from our true masters,

Morkere and Hereward Leofricson.
To fight for such cause was not treasonous,
Nor needs some small defence.

Ivo. The stiff-necked churl!

William (*thunders*). What, dar'st thou face me thus! Take this proud man
And hang him in the market. He shall be
A fit ensample to these marsh-bred dogs
That dare stand impudently so and call
Resistance to my consecrated crown
Just, so it pleases them!

[*Thurkill is cut loose from the others and taken out, C.*

Will others speak?

[*No response but sullen looks.*

Then, Ivo, treat them like the rest. This isle,
Rebellious through five hard-fought years, shall know,
As York knows now, that William will not brook
Lawless and roving savages to maim
The peaceful order of the State and Church.

[*Ivo leads out the Saxons with the men-at-arms.*

Those are the last?

Buckingham. Except those hundreds who,
Insurgent while the gates were closed, deserve
Some general censure.

William. Is there among them one
Who for his birth or some outstanding crime
Deserves especial notice?

Buckingham. I know not.

Norfolk. There is, my lord; one of the name of Harold——

William. Not Godwinson?

Norfolk. Nay, nay, my liege, a churl;
But for his lowly state the wickedest
That e'er swung rebel axe. Before this siege
He was a constant weed of discontent.
If Hereward hath escaped, here is the man
Next to be reckoned with.

William. We'll question him.

Norfolk. I have him held hard-by; I'll bring him straight. [*Exit Norfolk, C.*

Re-enter Ivo, C.

William. Well, Ivo, hast thou done?

Ivo. Well done, my liege.
They rowed off in a barge: those that had eyes
Could well direct those that had hands to row.

Re-enter Norfolk, C, with Harold the churl and a man-at-arms.

William. Thy name is Harold?

Harold. Yea, my liege.

William. 'Tis ill

To fall with such a name into my hands.

Harold. That know I well, but I had rather fall
Into thy hands than glut the blood-thirst grip
Of those two butcher counts.

[*Pointing at Ivo and Norfolk.*

William. Guard well thy tongue!
Say nought 'gainst Norman knights; we'll not forget.

Harold. Then I have nought to say; they are the sum
Of all my plaint, the cause of my rebellion,
And if I shall not have a hearing fair,
The right of Saxon freemen in the môt—
Why, then, I can but trust, as others have,
In the protection of our patron saint.

William. Thou speakest well. Thou shalt have hearing fair,
For we do honour Edward's law. But first,
Earl Ralf, the charge. What hath he done?

Norfolk. If his allegiance to this traitor Wake
Were not enough alone,—why, good my liege,
He hath for two years broken every hest
That I and Ivo have made in these parts.

Harold (*boldly*). I lived in Waltheof's domain, not thine!

William. Is that the way of freemen in the môt,
To burst in ere the charge is fully read?

Go on, Earl Ralf, what hests?

Norfolk. He would not give
His oath-bound service as my vassal man;
No tithes from him; no help in time of war.

William. And Ivo? What hast thou to charge?

Ivo. The same.
No service—and sly theft, and murdering
Of any Normans who chanced by his grange.
Twice on sufficient cause, of theft and blood,
Was he made prisoner and twice escaped.

William (*turning to the rest*). Doth any know this man?

Harold (*quickly*). I can bring those
Will compurgation stand.

William (*laughing*). Earl Norfolk's peer?

Harold. Well know I that our Hereward would come
If there were faith that he might go again.

Norfolk (*with a sneer*). My peer, forsooth!

Harold. Ay, that he is. The son
Of Earl Leofric is a peer——

William. Come, man,
Thy words are wild. Canst thou inform us, then,
Where Hereward hides?

Harold. Nay, that I cannot say.

William. Cannot or will not?

Harold. Cannot, on my oath.

But if thou publish it abroad, he'll come.
He is not far—of that be sure; perchance
He peddles pots in Ely now.

William. Mad churl!
I liked thy speech—but thy dull mind seems set
To cancel all thy gained advantages.
Thou must speak well if thou wouldst face the charge
Brought by these earls; but speak thou shalt, by heaven!
And if we judge thee cleared, thou shalt go free.

Harold. I can make no denial that I broke
The laws of Norfolk, that I would not serve
Either with arms or tithes, that, when Count Ivo
Sent men to capture me, I twice escaped.
But, good my liege, I do deny the theft;
And in defence I add what they left out:
I was no man of Norfolk's, but of Waltheof's;
And to my lord, by any law I know,
To him alone owed service; therefore I,
A free-born Saxon, would not do the hests
Of any earl that chanced to pass my grange.
I slew the officers of Taillebois, too,
Because I knew they had no right to me.

Ivo. 'Tis false, my liege! He swore in heathen jest
To have their blood.

Norfolk (*as if slightly bored*). Why hear this lying churl?

William. Because it is my humour—and the law.
Go on, churl. Hast thou more to say?
Harold. But this:
I made no heathen jests; I am a Christian.
I do admit I swore, but by the saints,
To kill the murderer of my child.
William. Thy child?
Harold. Ay, nothing less. This Ivo count, on raid,
Espied my only daughter by the road
And had her cruelly bound behind a groom—
For what fell purpose anyone may guess.
Then later, when Saint Ethelreda sent
The Wake upon his track and Ivo fled,
They cut the ropes that bound my half-dead girl,
To give them lighter weight, and cast her off.
When Hereward picked her up, her life was gone.
William (*turning fiercely on Ivo*). Is this so?
Ivo. My liege, am I on trial?
William. Thou darest not deny it? Certainly,
This churl, unfavoured, hath made good defence.
Buckingham. My liege, thy pardon, but this Harold still
Stands culpable for his rebellion proved.
William. True, true; but much provoked. He shall go free,

Provided he can pay his ransom geld.

Harold. My gracious liege, when thou didst force the monks,
Because their seven hundred pounds weighed light,
To pay three hundred more, I gave my all;
I cannot pay a penny.

William. Hold him, then.
Perchance he may recall where Hereward is;
And if he can true information give,
He shall go free.

Ivo. Shall I take charge of him?

Harold (*throwing himself on his knees*). My liege, nay, rather slaughter me outright!
Oh, would Saint Ethelreda strike this man
As she struck Roger Picot and Gervase!

William. Stay, churl; what knowest thou of this?

Harold. What know!
Hast thou not heard how the good saint came down
And chastized those who foully slew her monks?
Came with her sister saints and stabbed to the heart
Those sacrilegious fiends? How the same night,
When William of Warrenne cried out in death,
His lady saw the demons seize his soul,
And sent a hundred shillings to the church
To pay for masses to redeem her lord,—
Which unblest coin the abbot would not touch?

[*William looks around uneasily.*

(*Harold points at Ivo*) And may the same fate
strike that cruel man!
Just now, as I came in, I saw a crew,
The last, please God, that rows from him to-day,—
A ghastly crew: some weeping, others mad,
And some reciting gently Scriptural cheer.
Some rowed, but where they rowed they scarcely
knew,
For he put out their eyes; and those with eyes,
They could not row—he had cut off their hands.

William (*uneasily*). Nay, Harold, we have heard
enough of this.
Take him out, Buckingham!

Buckingham. To prison, sire?

William. Nay, let him go—go free.

[*Harold starts to speak, as if to thank the king, but William waves him away impatiently, almost as if he were an evil apparition. Exit Buckingham with Harold, C.*

Ivo. My lord! Not free?

William. Ay, free! Didst hear, irreverent,
reckless man?
Clare, hadst thou not heard aught of Picot's death?

Clare. Nay, I heard rumours, but I had no
time
To make them true or not. 'Tis terrible!

William. 'Tis just! When will men learn not to despoil
The blessed saints themselves!
(*Bell rings in the church.*) We'll go to mass.
Tell Buckingham those others shall go free.

[*Exeunt William and Clare, L.*

Norfolk. That finger Harold pointed so at thee
The king well knew should turn upon himself.

Ivo. Ay, that was clear; I but fulfilled my orders.
But tell me, Norfolk, did I blanch as he?

Norfolk. Forbid! White never showed in thy beefy cheeks!
Do you come to mass?

Ivo (*with a smile*). I'll tell Buckingham.

Norfolk (*who has started towards the door, L, turns and takes Ivo's arm*). I'll come see that thou gettest the order right.

[*Exeunt C.*

CURTAIN.

Scene 4.

Time: Three days later than Scene 3.

Place: Winchester, William's private audience-chamber. William, Matilda, Rufus, Constance, and Renard. William and Rufus are dressed for hunting. Matilda is teaching Constance to embroider. Renard squats on the rug before the fire and fingers a kind of small viol.

William. Come, Renard, yet another song—the song
That tells how Roland blew upon his horn
And called to his aid the host of Charlemagne.

[*Renard gets up and strikes one or two notes on his viol.*

Matilda. And then the fight at Roncevals! My lord,
When shall we have an end of blood and war?

William. When all of us are Lanfrancs.

Renard. Nay, my liege, I can tell you when we shall have an end of blood and war.

William. Well, wisdom, when?

Renard. Why, when thou and I be dead.

William. What will that say?

Renard. Why, my lord, we being dead, buried

and gone to heaven, we shall certes have an end; for blood and war are of this world, out of which we, being dead, shall without doubt be. Videlicet.

William. Not so fast. Thou thinkest to earn a penny by thy wit, but shall we not have war when we are dead because we who strive to keep the peace are gone?

Renard. Not we, but our heirs. Yet not ours, either; for I am resolved to leave so many heirs and so little inheritance that 'twill not be worth the fighting for.

William (*laughing*). Here is thy penny. I had given thee two but that I feared to swell the inheritance of thy posterity.

Renard. Nay, no fear o' that. I have long since squandered more than I shall ever get ere I come to make thy will.

William. My will? What does the fool mean now?

Renard. Faith, sire, is not thy will mine? An I do not thy bidding, I am the first Norman with that advantage.

William (*throwing him a purse*). A crowd of pennies for that! But, Maud, if not of Roland, then what song?

Matilda. Nay, let us have a dainty rime—a lay of Carcassonne.

William. Not that to-day, my love!
'Tis scarce a week since Hereward's Provençe dame,
Torfrida, stood behind the camp at Aldreth
And called the saints' perdition on our arms.
I like not that—for in a dream I saw
St. Ethelreda standing on a hill—
I told thee what dire death she meted out
To Picot and Gervase—; no sword she had,
But with a lancing fury looked—and sudden,
Though she stood there and seemed herself to speak,
The words were Harold's (the churl I told thee of)
And slowly, terribly, and three times spoken:
"Some rowed, but where they rowed they scarcely knew,
For he put out their eyes; and those with eyes
They could not row—he had cut off their hands."
And then a voice that sounded like the wind,
Far-off, but strong and dreadful; thus it sighed:
"All broken by the numbing Norman blast,
Like ice-bound trees when the victorious North
Exultingly routs the rack and scours the sky
And breaks their tortured branches." What think you?
Was it the saint herself who spoke?

Matilda. My lord!

These are but fancies; what may one not dream?

William. Nay, when thereafter I did close my lids
But slept not, though I saw no more the saint,
I heard that melancholy wind all night
With those same words—"And breaks their tortured branches."

Matilda. 'Twas Ivo did it, was it not? Why take
This dream unto thyself?

William. Nay, I do not;
But, Maud,—let's not have now a Provençe song!

Matilda. Nor yet a Saxon song! Hast heard them, William?
A beggar minstrel came one day to court,
And so we had him in. Such noises!—Oh!

[*Matilda parodies a Saxon measure, humming with absurd emphasis and swaying back and forth with each line.*

'Twas like a swarm of angry bees! Or, rather
More like the groaning of a Saxon churl
When stung to frenzy by a swarm of bees!

Constance. Why not the song of Roland?

Rufus. Ay, 'tis brave
The way they stand against the Moors,—
Archbishop Turpin and the rest! (*To Constance*) Dost mind

How with one blow he clave that Saracen
Clean to the waist and through the horse's back?
[*Rufus laughs gleefully.*

Constance. And, mother, thou didst tell us, yesternight,
How of all men afield there was but one
Whom thou didst care to see, and that because
He fought like Roland in the song.

Matilda. Ah, child,
Far rather would I see him safe at home!

Rufus. And thou toldest how the first time, years ago,
When thou didst see him riding to the wars,
Thou thought'st him then the bravest——

Matilda (*clapping her hand on Rufus' mouth*). Rufus, peace!
A pox upon thy babbling!

William (*laughing and caressing Matilda*). Truth, my Maud?
Well, Rufus, I could tell thee of a youth
Went riding to the wars—oh, years ago—
And thought the light in one high Flemish casement
Far brighter than the sun. Is't truth, my Maud?

Matilda. As if thou didst not know! Well, my brave lord,
Let's have the song of Roland. I will think

Thy hand swings Durendal. Nay, nor yet that!
For Roland fell. Then thou art Charlemagne!

William. So old, with such a hoary beard?

Matilda. Nor that.
Let's see—I have it: thou'rt a Norman youth—
Oh, years ago—and riding to the wars!

[*William motions to Renard, who strikes a note or two and then sings.*

Renard. Roland puts to his lips the horn,
Mouths it, and blows the blast forlorn;
High are the mountains, far flies the sound
Across full thirty leagues of ground.
Charles and his men have heard the call;
Cries the king: "Our comrades fight and fall."
To which Count Ganelon dares reply:
"From other lips that were a lie."

William (*interrupting*). Hold! We'll not hear of dastard Ganelon.
Sing rather how Count Roland, set at bay,
Veillantif dead, swung mighty Durendal;
How all the peers stood by him to the death;
How great Archbishop Turpin struck for God—
Would Odo were another of like trust!
Or tell us how Charles turned him with his host,
And found his kinsman dead at Roncevals,
And prayed the Lord God to make stand the sun,
And communed with an angel; tell us how

He drove the paynims through the vale of shades
And fed them, crying to vain Tervagant,
Damned into Ebro's black, engulfing flood!

Renard. My liege, that comes in the course of the song.

William. Nay, I'll not wait; let's have at once the charge;
Let's cut them down! Oh, let's sack Saragossa!

Renard (*after a couple of notes, sings*).

For Charles hath God great wonder done;
Still in its course hath stood the sun.
The paynims flee, the Franks pursue;
At Val Ténèbres they charge them through;
And on to Saragossa, till,
Striking with might, they drive and kill,
Cutting the paynims from retreat.
Before them lies the Ebro fleet,
Terrible are its waves and deep,
Nor is there barge nor dromond there,
Nor Mahomet to heed their prayer,
Nor Tervagant some aid to bear.
Then in the stream they vainly leap.
The horsemen are the heaviest;
Some to the bottom sink from sight,
While others float down on the crest.
(More happy they who die outright!
For all at last drown miserably.)

The Franks exclaim, "Ah, wretched ye,
That ever you did Roland see!"
When Charles sees all the heathen dead,
Some killed, but mostly drowned perforce
(His horsemen are with booty sped),
The king, dismounting from his horse,
Flings on the ground and praises God.
The sun is down when he hath done.
The emperor says: "The time hath come
To camp; too late the hour to go
Back for our rest at Roncevaux.
Our horses are with labour sped,
Take off the bridle from their head,
And let them graze here in the mead."
Answer the Franks: "Sire, well you rede."

Enter Gaston, L.

Gaston. My liege, the steeds are saddled at the door.

Rufus (*springing up*). Come, father, let's be off.
[*Exit Gaston.*

William. Ay, boy, to hunt!
The rest we'll hear another time, Renard.
Farewell, my Maud. Farewell, my little girl.
[*Constance holds up her work for him to admire.*
Nay, that thy mother did

Constance. Nay, father, I.

William. Brave progress! Thou hast been industrious!

That's right, my child. 'Tis courage makes a boy,
While industry befits a girl.

Enter Gaston, L.

Gaston. My liege,
The Earl of Norfolk is but just arrived,
Must see his sovereign straight, he bids me say.

William. Go tell the Earl of Norfolk he must wait.

Gaston. He said I was to add, if 'twere refused,
That what he brought was matter of great moment.

Wiliam. Dost hear! God's Splendour! Do as thou art bid!

Say that King William rides to hunt.

[*Exit Gaston, L.*

Matilda. My lord,
Were it not wiser to give audience now?

William. No, Maud; I know his matter. 'Tis as light
To answer "Never" when I have returned
As say it now.

Matilda. But if thou favoured him,
Granting him Hereford's sister as he prays,—

William. And England's girdle as her dower to him!

Matilda. —In common gratitude he must keep peace.

William. He has no gratitude. These barons, Maud,
All look for private gain. Fitz-Osbern gone,
Scarce one can comprehend a thing so large,
A thing so worth united loyalty
As law-abiding service to a throne.
Oh, Maud, if I had yet Fitz-Osbern sire,
With Lanfranc should we build a monument
Of law, of empire, men should talk of still
When every Norman is forgotten, dead
As they that build Egyptian palaces—
Forgotten but for him they'd call "The Great"!
Now wasting sunshine settling barons' brawls!
Each watches for my slip. One scarce can blame
So small a man as Norfolk, if in haste,
Lest others take too much, he comes before.
But I'll not grant his boon. Come, Rufus, boy!

[*Exeunt William and Rufus, L.*

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

Scene 1.

Time: 1078.

Place: Rouen. Room in the duke's castle. Robert, Shrewsbury, Buckingham, Belesme, and Clare.

Robert. Are we all met, my lords?
Belesme. Yes, every one
But Mowbray.
Robert. He'll not come, I trust. The truth,
Good Count, is that friend Mowbray is a blab,
A woman with his tongue, and, like a woman,
Too jealous, hot of speech; we'll use him yet
When we have need to ply a cutting tool.
Clare. Where's William of Breteuil?
Robert. Still fast asleep.
He drank too much last night. To rouse him now
Were to disturb a happy, sleeping child;
To bring him here, still red-eyed from his wine,
Were but to set a madman in our midst.
Clare. But he is on our side?
Robert. No doubt of that!
[*As he talks Robert goes and looks behind a hanging, R.*

Buckingham. What mean you? Are we five conspirators?
I was bid here on pressing business, boy;
But if it be to hatch conspiracy,—
Why, Walter Giffard hath too long been true.

Robert (*angrily*). Boy, greybeard! Speak so when I give thee leave!
(*Laughing*) Conspiracy, my lord, slinks out by night
And meets in secret caves and signs in blood;
But here the sun shines on five honest men.
See, if thou doubt'st.

[*He throws open the casement and calls out.*

Here, fellow, with despatch
Run tell the queen Prince Robert waits her here.

[*Throws a coin.*

There, Buckingham, does that seem secrecy?

Buckingham (*scornfully*). Thou art aware the queen is at Bayeux.

Robert. I knew it not. But take it as thou likest,
Earl Buckingham. If thou dost treachery fear
And catch thy poor head for its whirling brains,
Why, then, my lord, the door. We need cool heads;
We need—and had not doubted—loyal hearts!

Shrewsbury. Come, Buckingham, let's hear what thing is toward
Before we ruffle so. To hear's no harm.

Buckingham. 'Tis villainy, my lord; 'tis treachery,
If what we hear is privy 'gainst the king.

Robert. Well said, old man! A loyal heart beats there.

Buckingham. Then, Robert, why that peeking by the door?
What fear of spies if honesty be toward?

Robert. In all thy little dotage hast thou ne'er
Seen honest councils grave enough to guard
From ears and tongues of prating arras-mice?

Buckingham (*proudly*). My child, I have accompanied thy sire
(What thou had'st never reverence to do),
Been of his closest councils, in his wars,
And never yet have I seen William start
For fear of arras-mice, nor yet have heard
One word of insult to a liege-man sworn.
And as for this dark plotting I suspect,
Why, rumour, Robert, walks no more abroad
With shifty knaves, but, most respectable,
Gains countenance of fact. Did not young Roger,
The trusted son of Osbern, trusted sire,
Join with that upstart Ralf in mutiny?
Why do men say with looks, sometimes with words
(Pointing upon the fate that followed Ralf),
"Will William dare imprison his own son?"
Then whistle in the wind? Why, boy? the truth!

Robert. By God, Sir Earl, I'll not hear more of this!

Boy, fool? Since when hast thou a grand-dame been?

Buckingham. Thy father thunders, but his lightning strikes.

Robert (*snatching at Buckingham's beard*). Wag thy white beard! I'll pull it off thy chin!

Buckingham (*hand on hilt*). By heaven, if thou do!

Clare. Oh, insult, sir!

[*Robert draws his sword; Shrewsbury seizes Buckingham and pulls him back; Belesme holds Robert's arm.*

Belesme. Put up, put up, my lord! He speaks in haste;

He knows not what he says; he will repent.

Robert. But give me leave to teach him with this steel,

I warrant then he'll know what he hath said!

Shrewsbury. No blood, good sirs, no blood! If blood's to spill,

We need it for the foes of Normandy.

Belesme. Well spoken! Prince, put up thy sword, I pray.

See, Buckingham is calm, has empty hands.

Robert (*putting his sword up testily*). 'Twere blood well spent to shed such traitor blood;

We'll sleep the better when we're rid of worms!

Buckingham (*calmly*). My Prince, 'tis an ungallant speech of thine.

I do retract; I crave thy gracious pardon;
I spoke perhaps in haste. Now I will go,
For plainly we were not made for one team.

Robert. No, thou art certes an unruly mule.
But go, but go! Earl Shrewsbury, show the door.

[*Shrewsbury shows Buckingham to the door*).

Buckingham (*To Shrewsbury as they go*). Will Roger of Montgomery stay?

Shrewsbury (*to Buckingham*). I stay
To hearken to what path this plotting points.
My heart's with William.

Buckingham. Then be, too, thy head!
'Tis treason to thyself as to the king
To feign disloyalty for any end!

Shrewsbury. Good, blunt, old Buckingham! Thy northern heart
Needs consort of a southern head. But go,
And I will bring thee word.

Buckingham (*angrily, rather loudly*). I'll hear no word!

Robert (*overhearing*). What! whispering by doors? Conspiracy?
Be gone, I tell thee, Buckingham! and take

Good care of thy white beard; I'll not forget
To bring a razor for that chattering chin!

Buckingham (*very stately*). My lord, adieu.

[*Exit.*

Clare. Robert, what hast thou done?
I counselled thee against the king's loved friend.

Robert. Fool! He has naught to say. What proof is there?
If he but prattle of conspiracy
Good folk will shake their heads and say, "Alack!
Earl Buckingham is tottering to his grave."
Yet had he been but with us! Strong allies
Would follow him. The stake was worth the throw.
But let him talk! If we do swiftly move,
Although he blast out like the North Sea wind,
We shall outrun him, be the first afield!

Belesme. Were it not wiser, then, to come to point?
My father yet stands gaping for the news.

Robert. True, true. Good Earl, thou'lt pardon me the thought,
But after this strange outburst one must guard;
I therefore, not so much to doubt thy heart
As circumspectly to proceed, bid swear
Thee, and thy son, and Clare to hold as trust
Whatever shall be said by us to-day.

Clare. I swear, my lord.

Belesme. And I.

Shrewsbury (*hesitates a moment*). And I, my lord.

Robert. Good, gentlemen! What need we then explain?

Let's have the bumpers in and drink defeat
To William, bastard king! The King of France
Has promised money, men, and for a base
Has offered us his keep at Gerberoi.

Shrewsbury. My lord, a moment. I will not dissemble;

I am as stanch as good Earl Buckingham.
And now I see your pressing business points
To treason foul——

Robert. Another faint of heart!

Shrewsbury. I am not apt to unlearn loyalty.

Yet did I hope the earl's suspicion
Might be unfounded, waited here to learn,
Swore secrecy, but not disloyalty——

Robert. And wavered 'twixt the scales. If Buckingham,

With all the vassalage at his command,
Had not been fearful of an old king's wrath,
Had dared to join the justice of our cause,
Why, then, my lord,—you had not been left out?

Shrewsbury. 'Tis false! I never wavered—nor do I now.

My mouth is sealed; but when your swords are out

I then may strike a blow for my good king!

[*Exit.*

Clare. Another gone! My lord, our cause is lost!

Robert. Lost, Clare? Why, France is yet upon our side,

And Odo has assured ten thousand men;

And Mowbray, too,—a valiant gentleman!

Clare. But not one wise in council.

Robert. Three's enough

For council, Clare; and when we come to blows—

Why, Mowbray is a match for any man.

I hardly hoped for Buckingham, nor yet

For Shrewsbury—but it was worth the risk!

With them our cause were won; now we must fight—

The greater glory, therefore, when we win!

And haply in the skirmish we may kill

Those earls who *with* us were so troublesome,

But who *against* us do accuse themselves.

[*Goes to the door and calls.*

Here, fellow, bring the bowl of wine.

[*Turning to Belesme and Clare.*

The risk,

My lords, lends spice—a dainty Norman dish;

For who would gorge unsalted Saxon food?

Belesme. Doubt not my heart, good cousin; it is thine;

And yet thy words, the way thou lightly passest
Death-sentence on these valiant English earls,
And picturest all the cruelty of war—
I have a tender stomach, if thou wilt,—
And this unnatural slaughter makes me sick.
I'll fight a Frank or Saxon in cold blood,
But thus to reckon on a Norman's death——

Robert. Thy sires, my friend, bore no such tender love
To English earls.

Belesme. But Beaumont is my friend;
And my own father, Shrewsbury, as thou knowest,
Has William but to thank that he's an earl.
I swear, good Robert, 'tis unnatural!

[*The servant brings the wine in five goblets; then stands clumsily.*

Robert (*cuffs him*). Be off, thou clown! Who made thee councillor? [*Exit servant.*
But drink, man! With the pledge comes stouter heart.

Belesme. I cannot.

[*Clare takes one goblet.*

Robert. Faint of heart because one kin
Is follower to the foe?
(*Taking a goblet*) See, here I drink
A father's death, and with the other two,
For Shrewsbury and Buckingham brought in,

I'll drink, an it be needful to do so,
The sacrifice of my young brothers, too.
Talk not of love, my lord. In Christian words
The wily devil whispers in our ears
Till we translate our terror into love,
Call courage craven and unnatural,
And, quite unnerved, renounce the valiance
That lately we have sworn in name of God.
Such English devils doth Lanfranc call up
To William's service. Bah! my lord, the pledge!

Belesme (*takes the cup slowly, then drinks*). So be! I crave thy pardon for my fear,
But thou didst conjure up a stricken field,
My own dear father bleeding on my sword—
It took me by the throat; I love not war.

Robert. No more do I. I chiefly love a song;
A song surpasses slaughter! (*Laughs*) But, my lord,
Unlike the minstrel blithe, who sings a stave
To keep the wolf away, we kill the wolf
That we may leisure have to sing our stave.

Belesme. Ah, those were brave old days, when men could feast,
When corn unravaged smiled on every plain,
When smoke of hamlets signified good cheer,
When Norman rafters rang with Roland's song,
And trouvères chanted of old Lyonesse!
When shall such festivals be held again!

Clare. Would God our work were done!

Belesme. And so say I!

Robert. Why, gentlemen, 'tis hardly yet engaged.
To make the present braver than the past,
Till men forget the fight at Roncevaux
And jongleurs sing of Robert's Durendal,
Is better far than wish for brave old times.
Wherefore, let's form one plan. At Gerberoi
With William 'neath the walls is plain enough;
But first we must make just our cause; I fear
A simple declaration will but win
The lesser nobles to my father's side;
Men, fearing him, will guess his sure success,
And fear is follow; yet, if by some art,
Revolt in general and confusion,
We could bring William to decided loss,
Why, then's our time for declarations.

Belesme. Why not the King of France?

Robert. Oh, he'll not fight.
He is a man to urge another on,
But not to start a quarrel.

Clare. Why not Mowbray?
The very tool, my lord! I'll to him straight
And he shall get all Normandy to arms—
For what it matters not—trust him for that.

Robert. Perchance—but Mowbray may do anything.

My uncle Odo is the only man
Is sure of Mowbray's strange caprice.
Clare. Well, then,
That's not so hard. Go to the Bishop Odo,
Who, as thou say'st, lends service to our cause,
Explain the plan—the rest is fairly done!
Robert. By heaven, excellent! Thy cunning, Clare,
Was ever flashing as thy good shrewd sword.
But there's no time to lose! To-morrow morn
The Bishop, now in Rouen, will depart.
I'll see him ere the sun has marked an hour,
And Mowbray in a week will start the boar.
Do you go separate ways. If Buckingham
Will blab, let's not lend colour to his tale. [*Exit.*
Belesme. A merry dauntless Prince!
Clare. He doth forget
That William will not yield without a fight.
'Tis only two years since the king in wrath
Gave him a lecture, and when Robert laughed,
Asking that he be granted Normandy,
Said sternly: "Know, my boy, 'tis not my wont
To doff my garments till I go to bed."
I fear for our success.
Belesme. Ay, so do I.
Yet think what we may gain! And if the boy
Succeeds (and well he may; the king is old,

Fitz-Osbern dead, and Odo on our side)
Then we shall have——

Clare. More wars, I truly fear.
Didst thou not mark the prince's truculence?

Belesme. Ah, that was bluster, Clare. More wars, I grant,
For France and Flanders both will bait him on,
But also merry days! My soul, I tire
Of William's changeless, unrelenting frown.
Let's have the old days back; I crave a change.

Clare. Ay, William's stern. Yet there is some report
That by his hearth he frolics like a child.
Perchance this Robert, when he is the duke,
Will learn his father's art; he bears the mark!

Belesme. They all do; it's the blood. And I no more
Can stand 'gainst Robert's smile than William's frown.

Clare. Well, may the change bring good! You take that way,
And I'll go this.

Belesme. Now silence is our cue.

[*Exeunt separate ways.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2.

Time: Half an hour later.

Place: Room in Odo's house in Rouen. Odo alone.

Enter Robert.

Odo. What, so in haste, my boy?

Robert. Ay, pressing need!
I hope your worship can grant half an hour
To hear and to give aid.

Odo. All night, my boy,
An it be needful. Is the quarry up?

Robert. No, uncle, that's the point. I lately come
From talk with Robert of Belesme and Clare.

Odo. Thou yieldedst to my warning to exclude
The Earls of Shrewsbury and Buckingham?

Robert (*a little shamefaced*). No, uncle; I could not forego the chance.
They had been such a power! Now they are lost.
Earl Shrewsbury is sworn to secrecy,
But Buckingham half guessed our purpose, raged,
And so, forsooth, I kicked him out of doors.

Odo. No oath? That was not wisely done, my boy.
It had been better to imprison him.

Robert. That had been churlish—he was in my power.

Odo. And now thou art in his. If thou wouldst wear
Thy father's crown, ride such a steed of state
As William rides, learn that a churlish act
Is better far than to be called a churl.
But all is not yet lost—the king's abroad,
And Buckingham was never quick to move.
Make haste for Gerberoi, proclaim thyself——

Robert. Nay, uncle, by your leave, I'll not do that.
We are determined that would rout our host
Before an arrow flies. First must we start
A baron's general quarrel with the king,
And when the king has met some slight reverse,
Why, then, good folk will seize our cause as just;
The strong man is the just in Normandy.

Odo. True, true, my boy.

Robert (*laughs*). So, uncle, if thy wit
Hath proved my blunder with old Buckingham,
Who is the wiser now?

Odo (*slyly*). Why—Clare, perhaps;
He hath no doubt suggested what to do.
But come, the plan; am I to light the fire?

Robert. Yes, in a measure;—that is, Mowbray shall.
But thou canst promise Mowbray to our cause;
Do but enkindle him against the king,
And he'll set fires in every Norman heart.

Odo. Is that Clare's wisdom?
Robert. Well, 'tis mine—and—Clare's.
Odo. I gave thee better credit, Clare! Why, boy,
Dost know thy foeman? He was harsh to thee,
But still thou stood'st before him as a son,
And parent mercy struggled in his heart.
But now thou must go forth as man to man,
The vizor down, a nation in the scales.
Thy father ran his certain course alone;
He never hunted with the Norman pack;
For from the first he felt himself a king,
Nor sought nor suffered an allegiance
With any wrangling, cut-throat baronage,
But bound them all beneath him, their true lord.
He cannot find a quarrel with this Mowbray;
A man cannot be jealous of his arm.
Mowbray's resistance were an hour's distress,
A slave's rebellion, insubordination,
Not the fair competition of a peer.
Why, I scarce call him brother; he's my king!
Robert. But what course, then, is left?
Odo. To Gerberoi;
Proclaim thyself and fight. Thou hast good men,
And France lends willing aid. Thy numbers will
Count more than Mowbray's zeal. We will the while
Enlarge our western boundary of Kent

And worry Winchester. I doubt success
If one of us must fight a battle pitched.
But stay in Gerberoi until the king,
Called back by Hugh de Grantemesnil to watch
My ways in Kent, leaves thee some room for plunder.
Then, when the king finds peace throughout my shire
And Odo busy at Bayeux, return
And stand a siege. Meanwhile I ravage Hants;
He hastens back; thou ravagest again.
At last, men, seeing Norman fields lie waste,
And William powerless to stop the plague,
They yield to discontent, call thee the duke.
First win the fight; then offer open war.

Robert. This, then, shall be our course.

Odo. But mark, my boy:
The Bishop Odo hath said naught of this.

Robert. No fear, good uncle; 'tis my private plan.
But send us Mowbray as a brave ally.

Odo. Ah, that is wiselier spoke! He shall be yours.
But why have ye not reckoned Taillebois, too?
He is of dauntless counts the bravest blade—
The only one dare give the king the lie.

Robert. Of Ivo Taillebois am I hardly sure,—
A valiant fighter, but a treacherous friend.

Odo. As sure as Shrewsbury or Buckingham!

[*Laughs.*

Of this be certain, too: Ivo will fight;
And therefore, since he'll fight, 'twere better fate
To have him arm with thee, not with the king.
He looks for plunder only—cares no whit
For Robert or for William; wherefore pay,
Outbid thy father, stomach insolence.
It is an easy course; for the proud king,
If Ivo makes too bold demands, will curse
And tell him go pick carrion with the crows;
But be thou cunning, all submission,—
Tell him his service is worth twice the pay.

Robert. Good uncle, thou are wisdom's heir. If price
Is all-sufficient bait for sure success,
Why, Ivo is our man. But art thou certain?

Odo. As certain as I am of mine own life.
And mark, too, Robert: Ivo is a man
Of mighty threats and merciless intent,
Best fashioned for a fight, but loves to talk,
To think his speech is cunning, dreams that he
Can weave an intrigue, undermine a throne.
Praise, therefore, of his silly, silver tongue
Will excellently counterfeit the coin
He likes so well to handle; jingle words
Before you talk of gold; if thou art wise
A little sum may bind him head and heart.

Robert. It shall be tried; but were it not more
certain
If these fair-seeming bribes of golden words
Slipped from thy easy tongue? Success were sure!
Odo. Nay, that I may not do. Mowbray, I grant,
Will talk, but not of me, nor yet to the king.
But Ivo, if his devil be alert,
May go audaciously and ask the king
To bid against our pledge—that is, *my* pledge;
And thou must understand there are some things
Not fitting in a steward of the king.
Thy quarrel will be out—no harm can come
If Ivo mentions thee; but it is not
My quarrel, boy.
Robert. Good uncle, pardon me.
My great desire had made me quite forget
That thou canst not afford to fall with me.
I'll manage this myself.
Odo. Good courage, boy;
Move but with haste, thy future is assured.

[*Exit Robert.*

CURTAIN.

Scene 3.

Time: One week later.

Place: Rouen. Room in the duke's castle. Robert, Odo, Belesme, Mowbray.

Odo. I bring thee Mowbray, Robert, pledged to serve
In this bold enterprise. Hast thou seen Ivo?
Robert. Ivo is ours; I followed thy advice
And spared an earldom; he remains in England,
And when the war is on, he favours us
By keeping Warwick tame; but should we need,
He succours us in France.
Mowbray. We cannot fail!
My lord, I have the word of half the earls.
The only men to fear are Buckingham,
Warwick, and Shrewsbury—the rest are ours;
That is, the rest who count. There be a score
Of fortune-seekers nosing round the king,
But they, when his great hands are void of gifts,
Will flock like sheep——
Odo. Wolves rather!
Robert. Then we'll cut
Them down like wolves! 'Twere wiser to be sheep.
Belesme. Mowbray, thou hast forgot the Earl of Richmond.

Nothing would stir him to take arms with us;
And when I touched on William's stern, harsh rule,
He cried he loved it, swore his monstrous king
Was like his shrew-faced wife——

Mowbray. That's true enough!

Belesme. Well, to be brief: the Earl rushed from the room,
His hands on ears; not only did refuse
To follow us, but threatened terribly
That he would succour William to the death!

Robert. Good friend, I'll not forget he wears a sword,—
But, by thy leave, he is not terrible.

Mowbray. Ay, let him aid the king. I still assert
The three I named are all we have to fear.

Odo. Blithely blot out this inconvenient earl;
Perhaps he is not terrible. But hark:
My lords, I have not yet heard William's name;
You count him of your foes? He's still afield.

Robert. Thou mock'st us, uncle.

Odo. By my faith, not so.
He's more to fear than twenty Buckinghams.

Mowbray. Our chiefest fear; the object of our blows.

Odo. Then why not talk of him? Where is he now?
I know not William, Duke of Normandy,

If he is not both terrible and swift.
A week is gone. He may have heard——

Enter Clare hastily, R.

Clare. My lords,
Take flight! Make haste, the king is at the door!
Robert. What, William?
Clare. Ay, he!
Odo. 'Tis as I feared.
[*There is some commotion and a start toward the door, L.*
Robert. No, no, my friends! Why fear? Good friends may meet,
Without the taint of treason. Stay, my lords.
For if we fly we shall be seen by all,
And then the secret's out. But here we're safe;
We'll call the servants in, carouse, and chat
Till eager chins relax, till that thin crone,
Suspicion's self, would ne'er suspect.

Enter William, R, with rapid strides.

William. My lords,
What's here?
[*A considerable pause.*
Speak, Robert, why this gathering?
Robert. Father, why judge us guilty e'er we sin?
We do but meet for cheer.

(*To Clare*) Where is that wine?
Go, bid the fellow hasten with the wine!

William. A semblant cheer, forsooth! Why is Clare grim?
Why glances Mowbray like a stag at bay?
Dost think I have not heard of thy complots,
Unnatural boy? [*Turning sharply on Odo.*
Brother, what dost thou here?
Make merry with these youths? (*Laughs*) 'Tis likeliest,
Oh, likeliest! A bishop, venerable!
Accursèd priest! Not even bishop's robes
To lend some saintly savour to thy guilt!

Odo. My liege, what guilt? Thou knowest me of old,
Art well aware that I am more than priest,
That Bayeux is the better for my breadth.
When I fought by thy side at Senlac field
Thought'st thou the work unseemly for a priest?
William, I have been England's governor——

William. And plunderer! Come, make an honest breast—
I'll not be crossed!

Robert. Good father, by my soul,
What, such a little time in Normandy
And so in Norman wine? Thou hast drunk hard!
By heaven, we had thought to make some cheer,

But thou, prompt father, hast preceded us!

William. By the infinite mercy of God! I'll have thee beat

For one more word of such rank impudence!

Pack, Clare and Mowbray, for your wretched lives!

And Count Belesme, thou traitor, follow them!

And mark, sirs: if this comes to outright war,

You shall be first to swing! Remember Roger!

His dungeoning is mercy to your fate.

Be gone!

Clare. Come, Robert, Bishop; shun a brawl.

William. By the splendour of God! No word, false Clare,

Or I will consummate my threat to-night!

Robert, stay here. Thou, Odo, too, remain

And answer if thou canst.

[*Exeunt L, Belesme, Mowbray, and Clare.*

[*William paces across the room and back; then speaks quietly.*

Odo, I have no certain charge to make.

Report of Robert's fault is sure enough

And he shall answer for it.

Robert. Come to the point!

William. Thou rascal, peace! 'Twere wiser to say naught

Till I have done. Now, Odo, as I say,

No certain charge; except thy company.

My lord, is there not a suspicious look
When thou, a bishop, honoured oft by me,
An old man, who should reverence his God
Were he but Earl of Kent, when thou art found
Here closeted with known conspirators?
It may be that the meeting came by chance;
It may be there was nothing secret said;
It may be—but these eager restless youths
Were, certain, not met here for mere carouse;
And from my knowledge, which thou dost admit,
My knowledge of thy proudly various life,
Of Odo, bishop, earl,—and plunderer,
I hold it right a clearance to demand.
Canst answer on thy oath? What dost thou here?

Odo. My liege, I count untried suspicion shame,
And were I guilty I would not confess
When thus arraigned. I'll stand an honest trial;
But I'll not beg off;—were I without fault
Or were I guilty, needy evidence
Would grow fat on my pleading.

William. Odo, think,
Think twice before thou speak'st. I reverence law;
The law shall have its course; for never we,
If we judge hastily in private spite,
Shall bring our nation to a proper peace.
These years of turbulent, unruly rule,
These years of war and crime work nothing sure;

All things must bow to an enduring law,
And we, brief, temporal framers of some code,
Must truly live, in godliness and fear,
If we would see our work outlast our days.
That man is swift who outruns breathless time;
There is no moment's respite for deceit.
Wherefore consider, Odo; speak the truth;
And well remember this: there is a law
Surpasses all laws temporal and brief—
Necessity! The serf, in whose dim eyes
Flares feebly recognition of some wrong,
The vassal arming to defeat his lord,
A woman desperate, a soul outraged,—
Necessity commands and they obey.
Know, Odo, that a king too feels this law,
Rules chiefly by it; therefore speak the truth:
God shall deal hardly with a bishop's lie.

Odo. My liege, I am the subject; thou art king.
Perforce I yield to base necessity,
Which, were I king——

William. No crafty wisdom now.
A twisting tongue breeds twisting thoughts; speak plain.

Odo. My liege, I crave your pardon that I spoke
With such suspected men, but I take oath
That I am not a party to their plan,
Scarce know what scheme's afoot. An aged man,

My counsel doubtless was deemed worth by them,
But as I am the Bishop of Bayeux——

William. God's mercy! Down upon thy knees and swear
By something saintlier than thy doubtful name.

Odo. This is o'er-hard, my lord.

William. Dost hear, kneel down.

Odo (*kneels*). May God have mercy, I am innocent.

William. And wilt thou now, as Earl of Kent, renew
Thy oath of fealty?

Odo. I swear, my liege.

William. Then rise and get thee gone.

[*Exit Odo.*

Come here, my son,
Come sit beside me here.

Robert (*A little surly*). 'Twere well, Sir King,
To practice no such mummery on me
As thou didst now inflict on Uncle Odo.

William. Boy, thou hast not one grain of gratitude.
I catch thee scarlet-handed with thy crew,
—Enough to warrant death—but check my wrath,
And for thou art my son, howe'er peverse,
Seek by some gentler means to win thee back.
I ask no fealty——

Robert. 'Twere wiser not.

William. But hear, my boy; if thou some kindliness,
Some faintest spark of filial love wouldst show,—
Nay, e'er thou show it, I am gentleness.

Robert (*sits down beside William*). Father, I want no gentleness from thee.
Keep England for thyself; grant Normandy;
If thou do not, thou'lt find that Normandy,
Less governable day by day, will wreck
Thy total kingdom, and not all thy sons
Will have the power to hold the throne of Rolf.
I understand these barons; me they love;
Thy sternness stings like nettles in the skin.

William. Thou understandest not these barons, boy!
Yield them an inch, they greedily take two;
And love, by their false measure, means to yield.

Robert. And yet these self-same lords would follow me——

William. To death?

Robert. To death.

William. Ay, so I fear, to death!
Because they dream, thou gosling, to dodge past
The spears of death and let thee run thereon.
Then inches! acres! as their worthy spoil!
Leave thou their silly promises, recall

Our ancient blood—oh, do not be a baron!
Be a prince!

Robert. A duke's sufficient, sir,
Give me my right, and leave the lectures out.

William. 'Tis but two years, boy, since I lectured thee,
And thou hast not forgotten, I will swear,
That I, the lecture done, gave thee a beating,
A hearty beating, with my own right hand.
Now mark: I'll lecture thee when I see fit,
And, by the Lord, I'll beat thee if there's cause!
Thou hast unruly lived, squandered my gold,
Mocked at my mother's birth, thy own grandame;
And, worse than all, no reverence for God!
By heaven, I'll have thee know this is enough.
Another hint of such unnatural life,
I'll cast thee like a common serf in gaol,
Accursèd, disinherited, outlawed!

Robert. Mere bluster! Dost thou think I am afraid?

William (*steps fiercely towards him. Robert puts his hand to his hilt*). Hands off thy sword! Wouldst draw?

[*Seizes Robert's sword-arm in a vice-like grip, then takes the sword off, Robert struggling.*

Robert. I'll not stand this!

William. By heaven, but thou shalt!
Go in and take good heed to hide thyself,
Lest some one see the heir of Normandy
Without a sword. (*Laughs feebly.*)

Robert. I'll find another sword.

[*Rushes out, L.*

William. God's mercy! Can this be a son of mine?

[*William stands as if struck for a moment, then walks meditatively to a window. After several moments' silence he speaks slowly.*

There go the peasant folk, on pleasure bent,
Along the quiet Seine. What has that lad?
Why, 'tis a net; good luck, young fisherman!
The maid beside him bears a basket; that's
For fish. Oh, how heart-happy both! How free!
They're lovers, I'll be bound! And, sure of fate,
The matron struts sedately on before!

Enter Matilda, R.

Matilda. William, is Robert gone?

William. Why, Maud, my queen!
If ever I did need thee, Maud, 'tis now.

Matilda. I heard high words. Oh, where is Robert gone?

William. Gone swordless to his room.

[*William shows Robert's sword.*

The stiff-necked boy
Thought he was grown a man, flashed steel on me.
There is his graceless pledge.

[*Throws the sword down.*

Matilda. What have you done!
Oh, William, good can never come of this.
He is hot-headed, wilful—but our son,
Our blood! Not to be treated like a slave.

William. When he lives like my heir, I'll treat him so.

Matilda. Oh, William, do but see the consequence.
At the first hint of treachery afoot
Thou comest like a sea-storm, findest here
Red-handed earls in mutiny, led on
By thy rebellious son—and why, my lord?
Because no proud man longer could endure
The growing sternness of thy rule. Revolt
Was certain, but a cunning hand, display
Of love where they expected scorn and hate,
Had quelled their base conspiracy, my lord,
More surely, oh, by far! than thunderings.
Each day a friend falls off. If our poor boy
Should openly defy thy ducal crown,

Which heaven help he'll not! My lord, what power,
Whom have we at command? Nay, William, fear
Has ruled in Normandy; and when the cause,
The fearful leader of the pack, is down,
Then mercy's but an empty, woman's cry.

[*During the latter part of this speech, William has sat down, his head in his hands. During the following speech, he merely looks up, speaking slowly and as if in pain.*

William. Maud, thou hast ever understood till now.
When I have sickened sore for human love,
When all the world has looked a grey north-east,
To thee I've come, with thee I've merry been!
If I have little loved these Norman counts,
And God knows I have craved, ay, sought, their love,
I have more wholly, dearly felt for thee.
Maud, only thou hast saved my heart from bursting!
Now I am broken.

Matilda (*goes over and sits on the floor by his knee*). Dear love, I know thy heart;
A mighty, tender heart!
(*After a slight pause*) I did not see
How grievously thou suffered'st now. 'Twas dull
Of me, a woman, not to see. I thought

Perchance a word might yet avert the doom
Which I see pending like a thunder-cloud.
(*Playfully*) Thou knowest thou hast called me
councillor.

William. My best! Fitz-Osbern gone, my only
true!

Matilda. Lanfranc, my lord?

William. I had forgot! Lanfranc!
But he, unlike the Bishop of Bayeux,
Reflects upon his office, gives himself—
And daily more and more—to God. The world,
Its petty jealousies and sinful lusts,
Fall from him; yet he has a royal mind
And royal comprehension of my need.
Would he were here in Rouen!

Matilda. So he is;
At least I've heard. I'll send if he be here.
[*Goes to the door, opens it, and speaks.*
Go seek Archbishop Lanfranc, say to him
The king hath present need of his advice.
[*Returns to William.*
Come, then, my lord, be merry! councillors
Not many, but of such rare quality!

William (*rises*). 'Twas but a mood. Thanks,
Maud, for thy good cheer. [*Caresses her.*

Matilda. And William, do consider my advice.
Would that the barons were as well aware

As I am of thy great, surpassing love!

William (*after a moment*). They cannot be.
Maud, thou dost know how hard
This loveless reign bears on me now at times.
Yet, there is no way out. I freely grant,
Could I play loose companion in their lusts,
Like our untoward son, I'd win—not love,
For love is godless that's without respect,—
But something else—say, a day's fellowship,
With drink begun, with daggers in the end;
And, lacking this, why—I must be severe.
For in the lives of mortals there's direction,
Unseen, unthwarted, working in the night.
The die is cast for me; to love or lead
Is not my choice: the Duke of Normandy,
The King of England am I, not a slave!
Did I but hear a hint, give audience
To one foul intrigue, I were of their kind—
A friend to spoil, a favourite, not a king.
Robert joins with them as a robber-friend;
And that, by heaven's grace, I'll not yet do.

Matilda (*fiercely*). Thou shalt not slander so
our eldest son!

William. By heaven, Matilda, he is impudent,
Unruly, profligate—no heir of mine!
I do command thee, if thou lovest me,
To cease these shipments of my kingdom's gold

To feed the lusts of Robert's robber-friends.

Matilda. One may not so command where love is craved.

William. Matilda, cross me not. I have borne much,

Too much to-day! Ten years hast thou made plea
For this base-natured boy. Not one more word,
By heaven, not one more look of favouring
Shall he, still unregenerate, have. Dost hear?

Matilda. My lord, I love the boy! In Robert glows
The sacramental blood of you and me.

William. So did I love; sought with much gentleness
To win him back; 'twas worse than letting blood,
Far worse than losing limb, to cut him off!
Samson, thy messenger, shall not be sent
To bear my money to the scapegrace boy;
Dost understand? If I do hear of it,
I'll have him blinded for his pains.

Matilda. My lord,
That were a cruel vengeance! Oh, my lord,
That could'st thou never do!

William. Then take thou heed
To hold thy hand. If Samson lose his eyes,
The fault is thine, for thou art duly warned.

Matilda. My lord, if Robert buried were, if he

Lay seven foot under ground, I'd gladly give
My life's blood for his resurrection!
And shall I not then give, while he's alive,
What paltry silver his poor heart may crave?

William. Thou shalt not!

Matilda. But I will!

William. By heaven, Maud,
Do not provoke my wrath 'gainst thy dear head.
I cannot stand one more—the best, oh, God!

Matilda. Then show that thou canst bend; but once, my king,
Once only bend to please a suppliant queen.

William. I'll not.

Matilda (*going towards the door*). I never shall forget this hour. [*Exit R.*

William. Oh, God, my God! Now quite alone, now dead!
Her morning smile was life. It cannot be!
[*Runs to door L rapidly.*
Here, fellow, tell the queen I'd speak with her.

Enter Gaston, L, exit R.

Yes, she shall have it all—I'd break my heart—
And yet if only this one blot, this son—
'Tis hard—it will be ruinous—to yield;—
She shall submit! I cannot. Oh, Maud, Maud!
If thou but knewest what this false love means!

How it presages ruin! Yet 'tis love!
False, yet 'tis love! The tyranny of love
Is stronger far than tyranny of kings.
Why comes she not? [*Runs to door R and calls.*
Ho, fellow! Gaston, ho!

Enter Gaston hastily R. William seizes him.

Well, what? Speak out!

Gaston. My gracious lord, the queen
Says she will not now come.

William. Not come? *Will* not?
[*William shakes him, as if to vent his fury.*

Gaston (*frightened*). Ay, so I think, my lord.

William. Think'st, fellow! Think'st!
Dost dare bring such report!

Gaston. Nay, I am certain.

William. She will not come?

Gaston. Those were her very words.

William (*shakes him violently and thrusts him out L*). Bring no such messages to me!
[*William flings himself down in a chair.*
Matilda will not come!

[*Some moments' pause. Then enter Gaston, L.*

Gaston. My liege, the Lord Archbishop waits without.

William (*starting up*). Well, fellow, stand not so! Go bid him in. [*Exit Gaston.*

William (*goes to door and meets Lanfranc as he enters*). Lanfranc! Lanfranc!

[*Seizes him by the arm and draws him across the stage. William throws himself in a chair.*

Lanfranc. My king, what has so stirred thy spirit now?

William. Broken, not stirred! Lanfranc, I am alone.

Thee only have I yet. Lanfranc, oh, say
Thou wilt not too desert a lonely king!

Lanfranc. Why, William, I have never seen thee thus!

William. Nay, never. Never was I so forlorn.

Lanfranc. 'Tis not for this base disaffection
Of thy ambitious son? My king, take heart!

William. No, no, I fear him not—nor all his earls!

But Lanfranc—thou art true—thou knowest well
The one thing that I craved—and thou'lt not mock?

Lanfranc. My lord, may God forbid! We have too long,
Too earnestly, and with too high resolve,
Been brothers of a closer bond than blood
For one to doubt the other—or to mock.
But I do fear some unguessed accident.
Thou'rt not thyself; war never shook thee thus.

William. Ah, Lanfranc, there be wars with subtler foes
Than broad-backed Saxons with their sullen eyes.
Lanfranc. My lord, I fear,—is not the queen quite well?
William (*slowly*). The queen, I think, is well.
Lanfranc. Then all's not lost;
For if thy truest councillor, the queen,
Is yet in health, why, if I know my king,
Though twenty brave Fitz-Osberns by their death
Or upstart children by their mutiny
Leave thee unaided, yet thou hast that which,
All else quite unavailing, carried thee
Beyond all mortals through a score of years.
I know Matilda; seek her now, my king;
Lanfranc's a poor confessor by compare.
William. Peace, peace, Lanfranc! Thy words cut to the heart.
But how could'st thou have known? I'll tell thee all,—
Yea, there hath been a fearful happening;
Thou'rt right, Lanfranc; war never shook me thus.
Lanfranc, if I were but some Saxon churl
And thou a farthing priest, what wouldst thou say
If in confession I gave darkling hint
That I had cruelly struck the one I loved?
Pronounce the penance as we were two such.

Lanfranc. My king, thou hast not struck?
William. Oh, never that!
But that perchance had been more merciful.
Her heart was set, as women's hearts will be,
To yield her true love for a false son's love,
And I refused to countenance the wrong.
She flashed like fire at Robert's name, cried out
She'd give her blood for him, implored, ay, wept—
And I, with all the memory of her love,
Gave not one inch. Oh, Lanfranc, only this,
This difference about a wayward boy,
Has shattered years of love, as when a child
Pulls out some stone and sees a tower fall!
Lanfranc. But, my dear lord, this may be remedied.
William. Nay, hear the rest: I stood thus obdurate;
She left; I run distracted, call a boy,
And bid him bring the queen. She will not come;
Lanfranc, Matilda will not come to me!
Lanfranc. She would not, but she yet will come. My lord,
The love of thirty years cannot break so.
William. I never saw her thus; she always came.
And if she comes not, Lanfranc, there's no cure.
Lanfranc. My lord, thou hast cut off thine own right arm.

William. Nay, rather, plucked my heart!

Lanfranc (*after a pause*). Be comforted;
Arise, my liege; success will cure this ill.
As to the queen, I'll try persuasion.
Thy part is action; she did ever love
Thy valour and thy unresisted sword.

William (*standing up*). Nay, Lanfranc, cures are not so merciful.

Lanfranc. Ay, but they are. One pines for remedy
And suffers for the lack; but seizes cure
And marvels how the ills are overpast.
Think how this world for centuries has jogged,
As yet unspoiled, still marching for its God,
Still making progress through embattled fears.
My lord, a king cannot afford to halt.

William. Has not an old king yet the right of love?
I would give Normandy for that again.

Lanfranc. Ay, and that still shall follow thee in war—
Love of thy archers, vassals, and thy queen.
I would not speak false cheer; my lord, I know;
In this great grief thou hast forgotten hearts
Which stanchly beat for thee: Earl Buckingham,
Warwick, and Shrewsbury, Rufus thy son,
And Richmond tried and zealous. Nor forget
Thy brother Lanfranc! Pluck up heart, my king.

What if I promise thee the queen as well?
There's counsellors and warriors of the best!
And as for granting Normandy as cure,
Think not of that. Thy strength is Normandy;
And when thou hast chastised thy wilful son,
The earls will know their master—

William (*quickly*). But not love!

Lanfranc. That yet shall come to pass. These men have souls;
Time will, must, justify thy rule to them.
If all thy bishops could leave greed for God,
Thy barons might the sooner learn of love.

William. Never was truer word!

Lanfranc. But keep thy course.

William. That course is plain; and easy 'twere to steer,
Had I the queen. But, Lanfranc, it is hard
To see salvation in the mask of death.

Lanfranc. Salvation springs from prayer: Christo servire
Est regnare. Go pray; I'll seek the queen.

[*Exit R.*

William (*after a pause*). He never mocked me for my misery!

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

SCENE I

Time: 1078. *Early morning.*

Place: Before Gerberoi. Castle in the distance; small church on the left. Fields, open woods.

Enter Shrewsbury and Buckingham, L, with four men-at-arms.

Buckingham. No word of Richmond yet? The victor sun
Hath long since broken through his eastern bars
And put to rout the mists on meadow-lands.
We should be fighting now; for this young prince
Hath gathered in a multitude of men,
Who, given time to form, can vex our arms.

Shrewsbury. Be patient, Buckingham. The Earl of Richmond
Is not a slug-a-bed; he smarts for battle
And will be here, I warrant, with the king.

Buckingham. Are thy men ready?

Shrewsbury. Ay, an hour ago.
But who comes yonder?

Enter bow-man, R.

'Tis a Warwick bow!
As I do live! And timely landed here!
(*Calls*) What, fellow, is the Earl of Warwick there?

Bow-man. He waits below the wood, to form his men.

Buckingham. 'Tis timely—we may need his arms to-day.

But fetch him, fellow. Hath he heard the plan?

Enter Warwick, R.

Warwick. No need to fetch me, cousin Buckingham.

I saw thy banners, and had scarce dispatched
My bow-man here for news, when zealous love
Brought me in person hard upon his heel.

Buckingham. Thrice welcome! [*They embrace.*

Shrewsbury (*embracing him*). Never man did come more pat!

Warwick. In time? The battle's yet to be? Thank God!

My poor men hastened night and day for this,—
But three days' march from Rouen through the mud!
My lords, we are o'er-weary,—but we're here!
And by your leave, Earl Warwick's men will fight,
Ay, bear the brunt if need be. Fellow, run

And tell my soldiers that we are in time!

[*Bow-man starts off.*

But stay. First hear the plan.

Shrewsbury. Then hear, my lord.

Prince Robert is afield. This day his strength,
Rank swollen with the perfidy of France,
Shall meet with ours in open battle-field.
Earl Richmond with his bow-men meets us here;
Our men-at-arms are drawn in line below;
The order is, if you arrive in time,
That you, with Buckingham, command the right.

Buckingham. But this untoward delay, I fear, is fatal.

Even King William is not yet arrived.

Warwick. And Richmond?

Buckingham. Nor is Earl Richmond come.

Warwick (*to bow-man*). Well, fellow, thou hast heard; run with good speed
And bid the captains form and march to where
They see the banners of Earl Buckingham;
I'll meet them there. [*Exit bow-man, R.*
But tell me, gentlemen,
How this mad insurrection hath so fared
That Robert takes the field. At home we heard
The king was furious for an open test,
But Robert kept within and mocked his threats,
Or sallied only when affairs awry

Called back the king to England. Then this word:
"Haste; Robert soon will chance an open fight,"
—And we were on the march.

Shrewsbury. Ay, thus it went
Until starvation forced the vermin forth.
A month ago the prince sent messengers
For parley with the king, who bade them pack
As rebels for their lives and tell their lord
To come in person if he wished to talk.
Then William saw the turn and sent for thee.
Each day we have expected what at last
Gives glorious promise to our eager arms.

Warwick. Bravo! And we are yet arrived in time!
And well it is, my lords, for Ivo Count
Will not rest long in France. There is a story
That Odo joins him in some monstrous scheme,
While William watches Gerberoi, to seize—

Buckingham. The English throne?

Warwick. Ay, that, if Robert win;
Else to demand enlargement of their bounds.
And Odo, rumour runs, hath greater plans.
He would succeed the Pope; he makes for Rome,
And William, if I understand the man,
Will not bear that, must stop him ere he go;
For Odo has strong friends in Italy
And, once a Pope, he is the lord of France,
To whom William himself swears fealty.

That were a monstrous office to perform!

Buckingham. A king who hath chosen for his officers
Such men of probity and godliness
As Lanfranc and Anselm will scarce allow
This rascal earl to win such majesty.
We must strike quick and cross the narrow seas
Before Earl Odo starts. And Richmond late!

Shrewsbury. There comes someone;—perhaps —no, 'tis the king.

Buckingham. And Richmond late! Oh, shame!

Enter William and Rufus, on foot, with six men-at-arms.

William. Good morrow, sirs.
[*All make obeisance.*
What, Warwick? On my soul, a trusty friend!
Here, comrade, no obeisance fitteth now,
For William hath a brotherly embrace
For such true earls. [*They embrace.*
Well, my Earl Buckingham,
Thou'rt fretful for the fray, I'll wager that!

Buckingham. Nay, but my liege, the enemy are out,
Their ganfonons a-glitter in the field;
'Twere madness to delay! Shrewsbury and I
Have waited a good hour for Richmond here,

Our men in battle-line.

William (*laughs*). Have waited? Ay,
But for the king, not for the Earl of Richmond.
Why, good my lord, Earl Richmond two hours since
Sent messengers to say he took the field,
To plead instant advance, to call a plague
On that old sluggard Buckingham, to beg
We start without thee!

Buckingham. Fiends! Where is he, then?
Our line was ordered to the right, his left;
And ours is there, but——

William. Peace, my Lord Quick-step.
Last night in camp I deemed it better plan
To send Earl Richmond two leagues to the south.
Myself will hold the centre, as the left.
Thus Robert, thinking we are weaker there,
Where fewer numbers but conceal our strength,
Will wind and charge our left—and thus expose
His back to Richmond's spears.

Warwick. Oh, excellent,
And we shall find his flank!

Buckingham. Why, then, not haste?
Give but the word, my liege, Richmond shall not
Long call me sluggard earl!

William. Give but the word—
And spring our proper trap! My lord, delay

Lets Robert enter, gives him time to wind.
Rush on him now, before his castle gates,
If you should drive him, yet you drive him in,
Not on Earl Richmond's spears.
(*The chapel bell rings*) What's more, my lords,
If Robert and his army were at hand,
I'd not forego my prayer. We shall need more,
Far more than mortal strength to win this field;
Think you, my friends, 'tis not a foolish thing
To beg God's blessing on a cloudless day
And then forget it when the storm is on?
These priests reck not the base vicissitudes
Which make us holy, blasphemous by turns,
But, fair or foul, sweet plenty or grim war,
They reverently pay their due to God.
Let us go in and humbly seek His grace.

Rufus. What, father, would you stay success for priests?

William. Ay, boy—for ill is won a victory
Not God's.

Rufus (*laughs roughly*). And dost thou think that war is God's?
That he who prays the longest wins the fight?

William. Dost doubt it? Impious boy! If I but thought
Thou spak'st in earnest, I would strike thee down!
Come, sir, go in to hear the mass. Make haste!

By heaven! I harbour no such infidels,
Whether in court or field! What, would'st mock me?
God's splendour!

[*William steps forward fiercely; Rufus turns to go in.*

'Twere better so, my son.
Thou yet shalt learn the virtue of a prayer.

[*As they go in, the sound of the priest intoning is just audible.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2.

Time: Two hours later.

Place: The same. As the curtain rises, several soldiers, pursued by others, run across the stage. Then enter Warwick, L, with two men-at-arms, who carry William, wounded.

Warwick. Here, set him here beneath this tree.

[*The King is propped against the tree. He looks dazedly about, raises himself, as if to speak, once or twice, then sinks back.*

My king,
The wound is not severe—a stunning blow,

But not a death-wound. (*Looking off, L*). See, the field is ours!
Old Giffard carries all in his mad charge.
Oh, brave! They flee, my liege! The day is ours!

[*The King scarcely pays attention, seems little interested. Suddenly enter from left, Robert with a half dozen soldiers.*

Robert. Where is the varlet earl, him I unhorsed?
There by that tree!

[*Rushes forward with drawn sword. Warwick's men offer resistance. Suddenly Robert recognizes his father and drops back.*

My father! O my father!

Warwick (*stepping forward fiercely*). Yes, he, thou graceless son! Stand clear, I say,
And try thy guilty steel on Warwick's head!

[*Warwick seizes his battle-axe and is about to rush at him. Robert pays no attention, but falls on one knee before his father.*

Robert. Forgiveness, father, I implore! Thy coit
So hid thy face that I mistook thee for
Earl Richmond;—art thou hurt to death, my father?
I do repent; I craved thy Normandy

I led this host against thee, prayed to win—
But, O my father, I have never sought
To run upon thee in the open field,
To kill my sovereign lord, my king, my blood!
Thou'lt mend, I pray. Say thou forgivest me!

[*William sits silently, in proud disdain.*

One word, O father! I have yet some heart!

[*A long pause, in which Robert kneels beseechimgly and William still sits silently. After some moments, Robert gets up and half turns away.*

To think this little hand unhorsed the man
Who rode like winged terror through our ranks!
I might have guessed—no other fights so fiercely;
No other hand could have uplift that mace,
Which, had it fallen, this scene had been reversed,
Save that no life had staggered from that blow.

[*Turns again to William.*

Come, father, let us make agreement full;
Let's call the men to camp. What boots it now
That they do hack at one another still
When thou and I, the chiefest in the fight,
Have so untimely met? For mother's sake,
I beg of thee, speak, offer me some cheer.
Grant Normandy, I promise that I'll swear
True fealty as thy vassal duke, thy man.

Say but the word, I'll call my arms away.

[*Pauses for a reply, but William still says nothing.*

What, not a word? No blessing to forgive
My crime against thy head?

[*Goes down on his knee again.*

But speak one word!

Enter soldier, L, who runs to Robert and speaks quickly.

Soldier. Haste, Duke! disorder in our ranks! A rout!
The Earl of Buckingham hath forced our right
Back on the spears of Richmond. All is lost
Unless the sight of thee can rally them!

Robert (*springs up*). Run, say I come!

[*Exit soldier.*

(*Turns to his father again*) Good father, this is hard;
It is unnatural to look disdain,
To speak no blessing on my penitence.
Yet once again!

[*On Willliam's saying nothing, Robert calls to his men.*

Then forward to the fight!

[*Exeunt L, Robert and his men.*

Warwick. Thy succour, boy, like thy late penitence,

Hath need of wings to win the battle now!

[*William beckons to Warwick and whispers to him.*

What, now, my liege? Call off Earl Buckingham?
Thy wound hath stirred thy brain to fancies strange;
'Tis sickness, madness!

William (*half raises himself and cries out in something of his old tone*). By heaven, dost thou hear!

Warwick (*to one of the men-at-arms*). Go bid Earl Buckingham beat a retreat;
King William sends the order.

[*The man hesitates as if astonished.*

No delay!

[*Exit man-at-arms, L.*

My liege, there is no doubt some subtle plan
That prompts thee to this action; I have learned
That William's strength is stronger than his arm;
But, good my liege, if I may be so bold,
Not seeing aught but madness in this move,
I crave some explanation of the change.

William. Not now, good Warwick. Think, if you do like,
'Tis madness—for perhaps it is; this war
Itself is madness. What if both were down
Robert and I? Young Rufus is a boy,
And Henry but a child—doth that explain

Warwick. My lord, thou art but momentarily
Struck down; thou soon wilt be thyself again.
And meanwhile trust thy faithful earls to keep
Thy kingdom safe for thee. What's more, dost think
Young Robert will give up? Are these long months,
This siege of Gerberoi, this victory
To be thrown in the fire? Is all our work
Still to be done again?

William. Peace, Warwick, peace!
I did call off our arms for subtler reasons
Than thou canst comprehend. There are some things
Hurt more than loss of land.

Warwick. My liege, thou'lt not
Grant Robert Normandy?

William. Warwick, no more!
'Tis not a question of a piece of land.
Fetch men, convey me to my tent. Then see
That Buckingham and Richmond have withdrawn.

Enter Shrewsbury and Buckingham with Belesme and Clare as prisoners in charge of four men-at-arms.

Buckingham. Here are the traitors! Robert hath escaped,
Riding in panic with his routed crew;
And William of Breteuil hath fled with him.

Thy messenger, to bid us cease the fight,
Was just in time to check our hot pursuit;
Ivo we lost, but Arnold on a spear
Drips like a roasting goose.

William. Where is Earl Richmond?

Buckingham. He, also, comes enraged that he's called off,
That thus his lifted mace was caught in air.
It was not wisely done, my liege.

William. No more!
I gave the order; thy part was to obey.

Buckingham. I have, my lord.

William. Then silently obey.

Shrewsbury (*to Buckingham*). Come, Buckingham, this is sufficient spoil.
The king can scarce recall the victory.
(*To the king*) Before thy order came, my liege, the field,
These capital offenders captive made,
Was so much ours that Robert could but flee;
His sole advantage is that he escaped
To Gerberoi, to starve or fight again.

William (*supporting himself with one hand on the tree, the other on the shoulder of a man-at-arms*). I would not seem ungrateful. You to-day
Right valiantly have fought. I thank you both

And beg that you convey such to your men ;
Each man shall be rewarded twice his worth.
[*Pointing to Clare and Belesme.*
These two are pledges of your work well done ?

Shrewsbury. Ay, they with many hundred of their men.

William. What troubleth thee, Montgomery? Art thou faint?

Shrewsbury (*with some effort*). 'Tis naught, my liege ; naught but a little scratch.

William. Go to thy tent and have it cured straightway ;
Delay is fatal.
[*Belesme looks anxiously at his father.*

Shrewsbury (*aside*). Nay, 'tis everything !
My son, my own blood, taken with these hands !
May William now have mercy on my boy !
[*Exit R.*

William. I fear, Earl Buckingham, that little scratch
Was deeper than it looked. He's better gone.
[*Turning to Clare.*
Stand out, Count Clare, and speak thine own defence.
Thou hast been captured with a rebel rout,
Thou hast foresworn the oath of fealty ;—
Canst thou invent some plausible excuse

To save thee from the traitor's common fate?

Clare. None, save that while I served I truly served,

And that I am not ta'en in treacherous deeds,

But openly as prisoner of war.

William. Well spoken; thou art no assassin-slave—

I'll grant thee that; but dost thou deem an oath

Preventive only of a treachery

That murders sleeping kings for handy gold?

Wert thou not bound, according to thy words,

For life and limb, for all this earth's regard,

For life and death? What, thinkest thou a man

May bandy oaths so lightly that, when he

Hath wish to change, he may do anything

Provided he but do it openly?

Where were my kingdom if all swore on whim?

Clare. My lord, I am a traitor, nor do fear

The consequence.

William. Dost thou remember well

What direful consequence I promised thee?

Clare. I do, my lord.

William. Dost thou remember, Clare,

When I have guilty been of idle threats?

Clare. Never, my lord; for sternness thou art famed,

Not mercy.

William (*with a good deal of emotion*). By the splendour of God's head!
Stern, ay, deserving stern! Do thy deserts
Peculiarly demand great clemency?
Clare. I said I feared not what the consequence.
William. Clare, canst thou, on thy soul, point to one act,
One single act of mine towards prisoners,
Save when I stopped Alençon's base insult,
Or when I cut the Saxons down at Ely
(And that, please God, by cruel necessity),
In which I have not rather pardoned them
Then wreaked a vicious vengeance? Canst thou, Clare?
Clare. My liege, I do retract. Thy manner, stern,
The fear of thee that shakes the hearts of men,
Works easy transformation in their minds
Until they, fearing thee, think thy acts cruel.
I, too, have been a dupe, like Count Belesme,
Have fretted, fancied justice was misrule—
But thou hadst never love of oiled words;
I will not plead; I stand here for my fate.
William. Good Clare, thy heart is trustier than thy head;—
Yet what is love without direction?
And what, faith, shall we hope of muddle-pates

When Clare, their famous counsellor, thinks wrong!
[*Turning to Belesme.*
Is thy case other than the lot of Clare?

Belesme. None other, sire. Alas! I sought a change;
And now I have it!
[*Throws himself on his knees.*
Mercy, O my king!

William (*disgusted*). Up, man! grovel not thus for mercy now! [*Belesme rises, shame-faced.*
Thy part was, plainly, to consider first
Whether thou'dst stand the shock, not to rush on,
And then, transpierced, to cry the spear was sharp.
This grovelling is a woman's way, and should,
If given rein, be harbinger of tears.
Now mark your sentence. Hang you shall not yet.
I do consign you to Earl Buckingham,
Who, an I not mistake, will ward you well.
But first I bid you, for this clemency,
To put off arms and helm and, kneeling, swear,
As you do value life, the leige-man's oath.
[*Belesme and Clare put off their arms, helmets, and coifs and kneel before the king. Belesme then puts his hands between William's.*

Belesme. Hear, my lord! I become leige-man of yours for life and limb and earthly regard; and I

will keep faith and loyalty to you for life and death, God help me!

William. This, then, the kiss of thy investiture.

[*Stoops and kisses his forehead.*

When we have brought this war to proper end,
Thou shalt, on payment of sufficient sum,
Return to thy own fief.

Clare (*putting his hands between William's*). Hear, my lord! I become leige-man of yours for life and limb and earthly regard; and I will keep faith and loyalty to you for life and death, God help me!

William (*kissing him*). Thy fate, Count Clare,
Shall tally with Belesme's. Enough of this.
Earl Buckingham, take custody of Clare
And Robert of Belesme. Warwick, with speed
Send to the queen some trusty messenger,
Say Robert is still safe in Gerberoi,
Say Robert won the field——

Warwick. Not that, my liege!

William. By heaven, yes! Say Robert won the field.

For certes we've not won; to-morrow morn
We break the siege and march to intercept
Lord Bishop Odo, if, as rumour saith,
He sails with menace from the Isle of Wight.

Warwick. My lord, destroy the labour of a year!

Give Robert leave to ravage as he will!

Buckingham. O surely not, my liege!

William. Is it my wont
To give false orders? Do as thou art bid.
Dost think this sorry landscape can be scarred
More than a year hath done, or, could it be,
Dost think my Robert still hath strength and zeal?
The game is up. We have good interval
To sail to England twenty times before
We hear of Robert Curthose on the raid.

Warwick. But, my dear king, let message not be sent
Of Robert's victory. 'Tis wholly false;
And buzzed abroad will win him doubtful swords.

William (*emphatically*). 'Twill please the queen! Say Robert won the field.

CURTAIN.

Scene 3.

Time: Three weeks later. Evening.

Palace: Brading, Isle of Wight. Hall in castle. Chairs and benches rudely got together for a court. The appointments are few and simple. Doors R and L. William, Odo, Warwick, Shrewsbury, four knights, clerk,—all sitting in council. All except the clerk are dressed as for an armed expedition. Six men-at-arms, two at either door, and two by William's chair.

William (*to Warwick*). No more than twelve?
Did Thanulf not report
That eight went secretly by boat to-night?
It may take fighting; twelve is scarce enough.
Warwick. Twelve men well armèd will suffice.
Hard by
A hundred wait. I feared more on the path
Might make too great a noise.
Odo. I crave your pardon
My liege, to interrupt; may we not hear
Why we thus sit in council? If 'tis naught
But setting sentries, I may then retire;
Much occupation—
William (*paying no attention to Odo*). Art thou well assured

The traitor must descend that path?

Warwick. He must;
He knows the scent is ta'en. No other way
Is swifter to his boats, and speed will drown
All thought of caution.

William. May he not escape
By skirting underneath the cliffs?

Warwick. My lord,
The tide's at flood; he must descend one way.

Odo. My liege, the night's already old—

William (*turning sharply on Odo*). Good Bishop,
Thou seem'st in haste.

Odo (*uneasily*). Nay, but, my liege, I thought
If there were nothing weighty toward, no matter
Wherein my counsel might be of avail,
I'd crave your kind permission to depart.
I have much——

William. Much to do! God's head, too much!
Then straightway to the point. Dost think I called
These busy earls for nothing? Or dost think
I spoke to Richmond of no weighty thing?
Hast thou no interest, Odo, in these twelve
Who go to intercept the traitor knights?
Thou art the chiefest traitor for arrest.
My earls, this steward of my shire of Kent
Hath, while I stayed in Normandy, but added

A crowning treachery to his treason known.
Warwick, arrest the Earl of Kent.
Odo (*springing up*). My liege,
On what good charge? This is mere highway work;
Even a king must have some slight pretext.
William. Odo, thy ill-sought words may frighten some.
'Twere wiser to keep peace, for, by my crown,
I'll not have more o' this masquerade! A bishop
And stealing like a cut-throat to his crime!
Oh, Odo, is thy in-bred mind so blind
That it can see no treason in thy acts?
Hast thou no left-hand eye to spy upon
The mad manipulations of the other?
Who boasts that he was England's governor,
When government to him meant greed and gain?
Who lent my Robert hidden, treacherous aid?
Who whispers in the ear of Hildebrand?
Who dreams of cardinal's cap and triple mitre?
Who are these eight men slinking to *thy* boats,
To bid *thy* ships wait but another hour?
And, had I granted leave for thee to go,
To join those ships, to embark with all thy arms,
To sail to France, to seize defenceless Rouen,
To visit Hildebrand in Rome, what then
Were next? Enough! Beyond I dare not think.

Clerk, read the charge.

Clerk (*reads*). In the name of William, by the grace of God, Duke of Normandy and King of England, charge is made against Odo, Bishop of Bayeux and Earl of Kent: that the said earl hath plundered the King's land in Hampshire, that the said earl hath given aid in the late rebellion of Robert, heir to Normandy, that the said earl hath unlawfully and with traitorous intent raised an army for embarkation to France, and that the said earl hath, against the express will of the King, made negotiations with Gregory VII of Rome for succession to the Papal throne.

William (*after some silence, rises*). Is that enough, my lords? Is any here
Would speak in his behalf?

Odo. My liege, the law
Allows that I may hear the charges read
Before all peers, not thus before two peers.
What are these knights? Call you these few a council?
Esto bonus miles, *arbiter integer* idem!

William. They were the best at hand. If we had stayed
Till notice could be duly served, thou hadst
Perchance found that course more convenient?
Thou hadst then been on thy proud way to Rome?

But thou shalt have full hearing. Do but name
What compurgators thou canst name. Meanwhile,
Under suspicion of the highest treason,
Thou must be held. Warwick, arrest the earl.

[*As Warwick steps forward, Odo raises his hand and speaks in an ecclesiastical tone.*

Odo. Hands off a priest of God! For shame, Sir Earl,
That thou shouldst threaten force.

Warwick. Come quietly
And I shall not need force.

Odo. No, sir, I'll not.
Know this: A bishop cannot be so ta'en,
Whether by force or guile. Inviolable
Is my high office.

William. God-a-mercy, man!
Talk no such canting stuff. Submit, I say,
Or, by the rood, we'll bind thee like a serf.

[*Warwick starts forward, but stops again as Odo raises his hand and pronounces solemnly.*

Odo. Beware! Anathema is thy reward
If, Warwick, thou dare such a profanation.

William (*laughs*). What, frightened by his oath!

Warwick. I like it not.

William. Thou art a coward!

Warwick. Nay, good my liege, I fear
No mortal man, nor yet sprites, goblins, gnomes;
But I cannot court hell-fire without dread.

William. Thou shouldst not fear to ride the fords of hell
If one to whom thou owest loyalty
Bade thee go catch a miscreant, fleeing priest.
This bishop is no Pope! Still more no God!
And no man shall be excommunicate
Without my signature.

Odo. 'Tis blasphemy!
My King, thy wickedness is past belief!

William (*laughs rudely*). Past thine! By heaven, thou hast no belief!

[*After a short pause, turning to the council.*
Will no one here perform the little service?
Arrest a traitor earl?

[*Waits a moment; then, every one hesitating, he steps toward Odo.*
God's splendour, then
I'll do't myself!

Odo (*raises his hand again*). Beware the wrath of God!
Thou dar'st not touch the Bishop of Bayeux.

William. I do not know the Bishop of Bayeux.
Thou comest here in hauberk, coif, and helm,
With lance and sword, without the slightest hint

Of state episcopal. Where is thy cross?
Thy mitre? Where sign of investiture?
A bishop, sir, is one who thinks on God;
I now arrest a disobedient earl.

[*William takes Odo roughly by the shoulder and marches him off L. The rest follow.*

CURTAIN AS THEY GO.

SCENE 4.

Time: Same.

Place: Rouen. Room in the duke's castle. Robert and Matilda.

Robert. Mother, he was relentless, adamant.

Matilda. Nay, Robert, thou dost meanly understand him;
Think what the insult to his haughty spirit
To be unhorsed by thee—by anyone—
And then to have the victor seek him out,
Find him there broken on the ground, and fling
Detestable generosity in his face!

Robert. But, mother, think how hard it was for me!
Here I had won the battle, felled my man,—

And now must waste my moments suing peace.

Matilda. Ah, Robert, was that hard? 'Tis easier
To give what one hath ta'en than to be asked
To give what one hath lost.

Robert. Dost think that I
Weighed such a matter? These are after-thoughts.
I followed him to kill him—knew not whom,
But one of father's host; and then I saw him!
Dost think I thought it out? God's grace, undone
That I had so unnatural been, I knelt
And craved his pardon for't.

Matilda. Of course, my son;
[*Caressing him slightly.*
That was my Robert's way—a generous heart!
Thy father should have understood thy heart;
Ay, Robert, he hath boundless love——

Robert. For Rufus.

Matilda. Nay, for thee too—if only thou hadst sought,
As he desired—it may be his desires
Seemed harsh to thee, but thou must not forget
He is thy father and thy king—hadst sought
To learn his mind and do his will,
Or, if not that, hadst not defied his power;—
Then, Robert, thou hadst known as I do know.

Robert. Why, mother, is the rumour then quite false

That thou didst quarrel with him, took'st my side,
And never wouldst be reconciled until
He made a full amend?

Matilda. Where was I, Robert,
When thou in Gerberoi hadst need of me?
In Rouen—in my husband's house. Nay, boy,
Dost think I can strike off my love of him
As a gay child cuts poppies with his stick?
Dost think, when I did give my soul to him—
And every day for thirty years have given—
Dost think that I can now reclaim the gift—
Or would reclaim it?

Robert. For thy eldest son?
If he lay buried seven foot under ground,
Thou'dst give thy life's blood for his resurrection?
Is that not what thou said'st?

Matilda. My life, boy, yes!
[*Putting her arm about his neck.*
Ah, Robert, that were little for a mother!
Her sons are all that justify her life;
And if they need her life—'tis theirs to use:
As she was born for them, she'd die for them,—
No matter what the issue! She loveth them
If they do seek some noble enterprise,
And if they turn their undeserving hands
To wanton crime—she loveth them as well;
As she was born for them, she'd die for them!

But, Robert, though she give her present life,
May think to give her soul,—she cannot quench
No, never! what is more than life and love,
What is the very essence of her soul,
Her breath for this world and the world to come.
Indissoluble is the sacrament;
And when a woman thinks that she will take
What she hath wholly given, take again,
As though the bleeding fragment were the same
As that unmated part the maiden knew,
And give as she deems fit,—she slays her soul!
(*After a pause*) Ah, Robert, thou must see how great the torment;
How I would give thee what is not mine own;
How, therefore, while the father and the son
Persist in such unholy strife, the mother's heart,
Bound soul and body to both combatants,
Must bleed for both!

Robert. Mother, no more, I beg!
I promise thee, I swear by all the saints,
Never while father lives to raise my hand
Against his power. There, mother dear.
[*Kisses her.*

Matilda. My son!
My own affectionate boy! But I had wished—
Oh, I am insatiate in love, my boy!—
I had wished more than that: that thou wouldst try

To please thy father—nay, do not surly look—
To learn to know his heart—for he is stern—
Ay, stern, but chiefly shy, distrustful, Robert,—
He hath had many lessons in distrust!
And will not treat thee frankly as he should:
Thou must submit, to learn.

Robert. I can't submit.
I'll keep the truce—but, well, perhaps his son
Hath some small heritage of the father's pride.

Matilda. Oh, Robert, think—think what it means to him!
Think what it means to thee! For thou must rule,
Must one day rule among these lawless counts,
As he for forty years hath done; no other
Can so well teach thee how to rule. From first
To last he hath achieved his will: a boy,
He won his throne; one after one a lawless baronage
He curbed or broke as need dictated it.
Ivo, the worst, the cruellest, is reduced
And now sits powerless in his petty fee;
Why, ere another day I wait the word
That tells how Odo's subjugation
Completes thy father's toil.

Robert. Nay, not from him
I'll learn; I have a different way with them;
Call it a manner, comradeship, or love—
Give it what name you will—'tis not oppression!

Nay, I'll not learn of him!

Matilda. I know, my son,
I know how harshly he hath handled thee;
He doth not know thee, hath not heard thy heart.
But give him honest opportunity;
For my sake, Robert, do but try once more.

Robert. Mother, I never shall forget that look,
That utterly unconquerable pride,
When I, the victor, fell upon my knees,
Forgot advantages, because he was—
My father.—How paternal! By my soul,
I was no more than upstart count to him!
Nay, I'll to Italy. Perchance some day,
When time hath blurred a bleeding memory,
When an aged king, chasten'd in his gray hairs,
Can brook a son that will not be a slave,
I may return. In Italy at least
Men will not question me about my soul!

Matilda. Oh, Robert, when thou hast so much forgiven,
Why not forgive it all—wash thy heart clean?
'Twas noble of thee to resign thy course;
'Twas nobler yet to do so out of love;
But purposes abandoned at the start
Run thinly out, like sand-engulfèd streams,
And reach their aim no more than they had done
If they had never been. But try, my boy;

Try for my sake!

Robert (*after a moment's hesitation*). Nay, mother, no more plea!

Thy words but memorize the wound. For thee
I'd do, God knows!—but it would not help.
Nay, I'll to Italy. But do thou say,
When my liege-lord boasts over my defeat
And shouts his ponderous oaths, do thou but hint
That thou hast just a faint suspicion
The offspring of an unpaternal sire
Somehow hath learned what filial love may mean.

Matilda. Nay, Robert, speak not so; for filial love
Comes lamely when it comes by deputy.

Robert. I am decided, mother; beg no more.

[*Starts towards door.*

Matilda. Hast thou sufficient for thy need and comfort?

Robert. Ay, mother, I am well supplied;—yet now,

Since thou hast brought it to my mind, I know
How costly life can be; if easily
Thou canst arrange to send to me abroad
Occasional small aids, I shall be grateful.

Matilda. Most willingly, my boy. But go not so,
Without thy mother's benediction.

[*Robert returns to her and kisses her affectionately.*

(*With an effort*) Go now and prosper. And where'er thou go,
Still carry in thy mind remembrance clear
Of thy high youthful heart; profane it not;—
Oh, never soil thy imperishable soul!

Robert. Farewell, dear mother. [*Exit C.*

Matilda (*after a pause, during which she several times is about to speak, goes to the door and calls*).

Enter Gaston, L.

Gaston, has word come from the king to-day?
No word? I read it in thy desert look.
Go bid the abbot come with pen and scrip.

[*Exit Gaston, L.*

[*Matilda then unlocks a large chest, from which she takes some silver-plate.*

A little silver—is that all? Poor boy!

CURTAIN.

ACT V.

Scene I.

Time: 1087.

Rouen, William's castle. William on sick-bed in his private chamber. Door R. Enter, as curtain rises, an attendant who gives the king a dose of medicine.

William. There—I am better now.

[*Attendant takes cup and exit.*

'Tis very strange
So little matter in a cup can do
Such instant work. Eh, there be potent things
Men put in cups.

[*A pause, at the end of which a fit of coughing rouses him from his reverie.*

Four years ago it was—
We lowered her gently down, her vigour gone,
Only the sweet smile of the youthful mother
Upon her white, calm face. Alas! Matilda,
Silently didst thou go, without a word!

[*Another pause.*

That boy, he was her life—and was her death!

[*Another pause; then a fit of coughing.*

How she would soothe this pain! O gracious God!
Have I not proper penance done? Must I
Still suffer for that pride? If so in life,
What shall come after death? What more, O God!

[*Half sitting up in bed and speaking excitedly.*

I'll seek some means of grace. I must see Lanfranc.
No further oath shall pass my lips; what life
Is yet vouchsafed to me shall all be spent
In leniency, in mercy; men shall say,
"This king ruled sternly in necessity,
But loved his folk, and with declining years
Established for the whole world's wonderment
A government of Christ that ruled by love."

[*Pauses again, still half sitting.*

Nay, it is mockery! I hear their paws
Upon the threshold now—their wolfish snarl.
With this arm have I made my power, and when
This arm sinks helpless at my side—ha! love!
My Danish dogs can understand my love;—
But these are wolves! [*Sinks back on the pillows.*

Enter attendant.

Attendant. My liege, will you now speak
With the Earl of Warwick?

William. Warwick? A trusty friend!
Bring him forthwith.

[*A long pause while attendant goes for Warwick. Finally, re-enter attendant with Warwick.*

Attendant. My liege, the Earl of Warwick.
[*Exit.*

William (*half rising*). Come hither, Henry Beaumont. It is sweet
To see a good friend in an evil hour.
Wouldst guess it,—I, that never yet have lacked
For occupation, have lain idle thus
Till I do listen for the minster bells
And greet their chime as 'twere a friendly voice?

Warwick. 'Tis long and hard, my liege. Yet thou shalt mend.
Methought to see a wasted body here;
Instead I find thee little changed—still king!

William. Ay, Warwick; but a king must tell his tale
And at the last be crammed ignobly in,
A counterpart of him that toils through life
With constant fear he shall not own in death
Six feet of land for decent burial.
This world is but a fragment of our dreams:
We hoped to be a castle with its towers;
And when the chronicler cons our sad ruins,
He finds us but a half-built, broken keep.

Warwick. What vain imaginations these, my lord,
For one who e'en abed doth still affright

The lawless into order!

William. Ay, what news?

Come, tell me, Warwick; are things then so well?
Is Brittany still quiet? The little birds,
That twitter here about the castle eaves,
Speak so of peace I have at times been fain
To fancy Normandy at last had rest.

Warwick. Nay, sooth, my lord! The land is very still.

The Breton Duke doth practice only love.

William. And Robert?

Warwick. Robert is yet in Italy;
Too idle, rumour saith, to make a stir——

William (*somewhat vehemently*). Nay, that is worse than when he offered force!

No son of mine, Earl Warwick, should know sloth.
And sloth in Italy, I fear, means sin.
O Normandy, what an inheritance is thine!
But what of France? Is Philip still ensconced,
Framing defiant sentences, but yet
O'er-mindful not to tread a battle-field? [*Laughs.*

Warwick. Ay, still the same.

William (*eagerly, with a smile*). What is his latest threat?

Warwick. Hearing the duke was fat of late, abed,
He said in jest 'twas time that Robert came
To claim the dukedom ere that he himself

Annexed it as his own. [*Pauses.*

William. Ay, ay, what else?
Speak truly, Warwick! In thy eye I see
Yet more unspoken.

Warwick. Nay, the jest, my lord;
'Twas nothing more.

William. There was! Tell all.

Warwick. Nay, Philip hath but added to the jest;
'Tis scurrilous and ill beseems a king.

William. What added? Tell me: hath he called me names?
And are they bandied upon Norman tongues?

Warwick. What import now? When thou art well again,
Then thou shalt hear and chastize as thou wilt.

William. But I'll hear now—speak out.

Warwick. Well, good my liege,
King Philip, who ten years hath occupied
The Vexin as his own, not only raids
Along the Norman border, but doth claim
Complete control of the disputed towns,
Pontoise, Chaumont, and Mantes; and when his heed
Was called to thy demands, he laughed outright,
Said there was nought to fear from Normandy,
Now governed by a woman—meaning thee!

William. God's splendour! He shall learn!
When I arise,
I'll go to holy mass in Philip's land;
Ay, and my churching shall be passing rich!
A thousand candles shall burn for my fee—
Candles of flaming brands—and shining steel
Shall glitter in their light!

[*William is again taken with a fit of coughing, after which he sinks back among the pillows.*

Go, Warwick, now;
I'll send for Anselm. His good spiritual cheer
Is better for my malady than threats.

Warwick. My liege, I pray you may find speedy cure.
Sleep is the best of priests. And sleep you may;
For rest content that Normans are at peace. [*Exit.*

[*After Warwick goes out, William slowly rises to a half-sitting posture and stares meditatively; then speaks calmly.*

William. 'Twas base enough to jest so of my ills;
But thus to ravage when he knew my sword
Was safe abed in Rouen—that was more
Than a low churl had done. Ay, Mantes shall burn!

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2.

Time: A few weeks later, toward evening.

Mantes in flames. In the foreground a street, with Normans pillaging partly demolished houses. Wreckage and ashes in the street. In the background smoke and fire.

After the soldiers have passed on, enter, R, Mowbray and Clare. They look about for a few moments among the ruins.

Clare. All garnered clean! Your Saxon or your Frank
May stand the brunt, but when it comes to plunder
Give me the nostril of a Norman bow!

Mowbray (*with a gesture at the ruins*). Well, is the taunt avenged? or doth the duke
Still mean to march on Paris?

Clare. Paris, man!
Dost think the fox who won by strategy
When he was seventeen, who played his foe
At Val-es-dunes, at Ely, and at Mantes,
Who rarely fought before the fight was won,—
Dost think he'll now go lay his head in the snare?
Nay, burning Mantes fulfills his threat of vengeance.

Mowbray. Ay, what a threat! How terribly fulfilled!
We were hot-headed, Clare, and very young

To choose the other side; for like sure fate,
Working its ways by night and day, when men
Are blithely unaware of gathering clouds,
Yet striking swiftly when the storm is on,—
So is his constant story. From the first,
He hath seen clear his course and, sun or rain,
He hath pushed on, unfriended, to success.

Clare. Ay, such a leader was Canute, methinks;
But not so terrible, not so intent,
Nor so alone. [*They pause to watch two Norman soldiers, who pass noisily.*

Mowbray. Nay, and Canute was gentler.
Here is a fitting monument, this Mantes,
To William's work. So York, so Ely Isle.
From first to last, from Val-es-dunes to Mantes,
He hath laid waste and prospered; he was born,
Ay, rocked, to battle; suckled to the sword;
Made terrible at a little woman's breast.

Clare. No, Mowbray, war was thrust upon the duke.
When but a boy, an axe was in his hands,
And in his heart a voice that called to him:
Thou hast no helpers, win thou must alone!
And he hath won a mighty victory.
For think you, Mowbray: Varaville and Senlac,
And all his battles pitched, were tournaments,
Mere pleasant jousting, to that graver war
Which he through thirty years hath waged alone.

I mean you, Mowbray, and myself, and Robert,
And Ralf of Norfolk, and Fitz-Osbern's sons,
And Odo, traitor bishop of Bayeux,—
These were his enemies, in his own realm;
And one by one they are all set aside,
Or turned to service and allegiance.
Think what the anguish if his love were great,
As I do sometimes dream it might have been;
Think what the travail when his spirit called
For order and restraint, for legal codes,
For trade and plenty and prosperity;—
Then rudely in, like to these common men,
These thieving pikemen we have just beheld,
There always came a quarrelsome menage,—
Great barons, if you like;—God save the name!
No, Mowbray, York and Mantes were thrust upon him.
Art thou aware that in no civil court
He hath allowed death Penalty assigned?
That for the first time in man's memory
A citizen with bosomful of gold
May travel unmolested through this realm?
Justice he hath maintained; and mercy, too:
Why, he did love the tall stags of the glade
As though he were their father.

Mowbray. Ay, he loved
The deer far better than his friends, good Clare;

But grant he loved, he never spoke his love,
To bless as well as curse——

Enter Warwick hastily, R, with a small body of soldiers. The soldiers remain in the background.

Clare. See, Henry Beaumont!
(*To Warwick*) Why so in haste? What news?
Warwick. Fell news, my lords.
Riding his charger down a smoking street,
The king, o'er-heavy and unstably mounted,
Pitched forward in his selle, and after swooned,
And now is ta'en to die in Normandy.
Clare. To die?
Warwick. Ay, so I fear.
Mowbray. A grim revenge!
Warwick. We must collect the soldiers and withdraw.
Mowbray. True; what gain we?
Clare. Not what we gain, my lord;
What *can* we gain without his guiding arm?
Mowbray. Hath he declared succession? Is it Robert?
Warwick. Nay, he hath not yet said. It may well be
That Rufus or young Henry will by force
Take what the rightful heir neglects to claim.
Mowbray. 'Twere well to know; these times will changeful be.

Warwick. Shame, Mowbray! Is thy lesson not yet learned?

The king is not yet dead; and, were he dead,
'Twould be unseemly thus to reckon prize
Ere he is laid in earth—ere mass is sung!
Besides, we have far other work to-night:
To bring our men off ere the King of France,
Hearing of William's accident, makes bold
To attack us thus confused.

Mowbray Nay, but you two
Gather what men you will; I seek the duke.
One Mowbray, by your leave, hath learned ere now
How service may make sure its own reward.

[*Exit.*

Warwick. Eh, what thin loyalty!

Clare (*after walking once or twice up and down the street*). Nay, thou canst talk,
Earl Warwick; thou art found; but when a man
Hath fed on favour all his life,—why, then,
One must forgive him if he crave his food.
Had Mowbray stayed with us, to call the troops,
It had been different; but now, my lord,—
Well, simply this: I am not yet an earl.

[*Exit suddenly after Mowbray.*

Warwick. Oh, William, will they plunder thee ere death!

QUICK CURTAIN.

Scene 3.

Time: six weeks later.

Place: Small chamber in the convent of St Gervais. Door R. Small writing-desk up R. On a bed, L, William is propped among pillows. Anselm is sitting beside him, between the desk and the bed. There is just room for a chair between the bed and the wall, L.

William. Ay, Anselm, days have turned to moments now.
'Tis well confession hath been made to-day;
To-morrow may be but a dawn.
Anselm. My liege,
Seek not more speech; thou hast fatigued thyself.
Thou'rt right: there may not be another day
If thou dost not now rest. Pray, speak no more.
William. No further speech! Why, I have just begun.
Anselm. Nay, but a good night's rest before thou try——
William. Anselm, there be no good night's rests for me.
What worth confession of my guilt if I,
Complacent in the salving of my sin,
Did not direct my heirs, did not dispose

The regulation of my lands?

Anselm. My liege,
I pray thee, rest a little while. Just now
The Bishop Maminot, thy chief physician,
Bade me, as I came in, to let thee speak
Only such words as hard necessity
Forced from a dying soul, and then myself
To add, in brief, some words to comfort thee;
But, good my duke, we have been o'er an hour!

William. To-day, Anselm, I can talk any length.
And I do fear delay. If I should rest,
By some mysterious influence I know
I'd come not back again; but still sleep on,
Tossed by my troubled dreams, by things unsaid.
Nay, let me speak to-day; when I have done,
Then I shall find rest easy, and my sleep
Will come upon me like the charm of childhood.
Call Rufus and young Henry in; bring all—
They all shall hear—the Bishop of Lisieux,
The Abbot of Jumieges, and what monks
The abbot choose. Alas! It is sore shame
That Robert is not here. Still, if there be
In St. Gervais some barons of his rout,
Let them come too; I would that all should hear,
And, hearing, witness bear;—for, Anselm, swords,
Now rusting through disuse, will flash again
Before my corpse is cold: if men can sow

Dispute among my sons, their spoil is sure.
'Tis curious, is it not, that men who live
And prosper by the law should licence crave,
Should mock the law they love?—Go, call them, pray.

Anselm. My liege, I do as I am bid, but, doing, beg
That thou wilt weigh the wisdom of the doctor
And speak as briefly as affairs permit. [*Exit R.*

[*While Anslem is gone, William sinks back among the pillows. Two attendants (monks) bring in a few chairs and make light against the approaching twilight. Then there is considerable pause before the door is softly opened.*

Enter Anselm, Maminot, Guntard, William Rufus, Henry, and three monks.

Anselm. These faithful few, my liege, were hard at hand.
Counts Clare and Mowbray, so one rumour saith,
Are on their way from Rouen.

William. Pray sit down.
I have yet much to say and patience need.

[*All but the monks sit, Rufus and Henry on either side of the bed.*

My sons, my lords, good priests,—my Norman friends,
I would have eager ears, and in your hearts
Some pity to your censure of a life

Which, whatever the report, hath gained its goal
By a little service and a mighty sin.
First, bear in mind, my sons, that royalty
Wears its chief sign in royal services;
That kings have no permission to enlist
Their country's riches for their private wrongs;
That with their privilege they must needs consider
The Nation's life their life, its wrong their wrong;
That by their very kingship they have sworn
Unflinching fealty to Almighty God.
And when they come to face their final court,
To tell on trial what was truly done,
There is no next appeal, no deference:
Their life's to justify by their own deeds.
And, as we count it greater crime for one
Who stands high in the state to break his oath
Than for a cottager, so among kings
The obligation is infrangible.
  Thus thinking, O my sons, I have well seen
How little worthy mine own life hath been.
Cruelty and avarice have marked my ways;
And only by a miracle it is,
By God's abundant mercy, that I live
To save my soul by full confession.
[*Glancing at Rufus.*
Nay, youth and arrogance and greed, my sons,
Drive a man careless forth; but haunt like spectres

About the bed of him that comes to die.
Be loyal to the church; support its needs.
Full seventeen monasteries have I founded,
Fortresses strong wherein the strife is e'er
To combat fleshly lusts. 'Tis no time now
That I should seek to justify myself;
But think you it not foolish that a man
Should pray to God, yet not provide for prayer?
Be loyal to the church; support its needs.
Throughout these realms of Normandy and England
There is a suffering swarm of poor and maimed;
Ay, one wise king might spend a constant life
Easing the burdens of infirmities.
Instead, through fifty years I have sought war.
A child, eight years of age, was I left here
To guard as best I might this turbulent realm;
And from that day to this I have borne arms.

Enter Mowbray and Clare, who stand in back. William pauses a moment for them.

Now calls a wasted kingdom for relief,
For peace, a little peace, wherein may grow
Those fields I ravaged in my pride of gain.
O York! dismantled York! Thy children's sons,
Ten generations hence, will count thy scars
And point upon the memory of him

That scarred thee. Ay, from Mortemer to Mantes
My rule hath run with blood; I hear the cry,
Out-spoken years ago at Winchester,
The cry of Queen Matilda: "When, my lord,
Oh, when shall we have done with blood and war!"
Nay, England, got by strife and held by strife,
Dare I grant thee to anyone but God?
May He rule thee hereafter!

[*After a pause, turning to Rufus.*

Yet, my son,
If England will have my succession,
I do commend the throne to thee. Rule well;
Rule peacefully. Here is a letter, writ
And sealed with my own hand, to my good father,
Archbishop Lanfranc. Go to him, my son;
Ally thyself with him; of all true men
He is the wisest, best.

Robert shall have,
Since he is eldest heir, this Normandy.
Would God I might see clearlier certain good!
And, Henry, to thy hand I here commit
A weight of silver,—full five hundred pounds.
Nay, look not so askance; 'Tis surer worth
Than lawless, loveless lands. What's more to the matter,
Thou yet shall hold it all; one day, I see,—
By what mysterious sight I know not well,

But somehow now I see what once was dark,—
One day thou shalt combine the two in one:
England and Normandy. Therefore do thou,
While still thou'rt young, cherish thy silver gift;
And study zealously against the time
Thou shalt be called to serve.

[*After a pause, turning towards the clergy and barons.*

My friends, if aught
Be now to crave, I beg you will speak out.
Ye are deserving of a boon to-day:
First by my death-bed, first in my reward.

Maminot. My liege, were it not a crown to thy just life
To grant their freedom to those Norman counts
Who years have languished in thy dungeons dark?

William. Ay, Maminot; that I have done. To Anselm
Have I already given written pledge
That they shall be released. All are forgiven:
Wulfnoth, Earl Godwine's son, and also Wulf,
His nephew and the son of Harold; all
That were imprisoned after Ely siege:
Earl Morkere and Siward Barn; and I restore
Earl Roger of Hereford to his old earldom.
And in addition I have ordered made
Full restitution of his lands and fees

To Baudri, Knight de Guitry. Are there more?

Maminot. My fellow-prelate, Odo of Bayeux.

William. Nay, not of him, good priest. I am persuaded
That Odo hath no single small desert.
Forbid that I should wrong a priest of God:
But, Maminot, this Odo was an earl,
A treacherous, truculent earl. Him I trusted
A dozen years and more; and every trust
Was basely misconstrued for his own gain.
Nay, not of Odo!

Anselm. But, my liege, why not?
If Roger, who did openly lead arms
Against thy throne, if he be now set free,
Why not the bishop, too?

William. Open revolt,
Good Anselm, is less dangerous by far
Than making pretence of support, to hide
Nefarious practices.

Anselm. But how of others,
Siward and Morkere? They both secretly
And openly, as circumstances called,
Led insurrection base—yet they go free!

William. Anselm, no more of Odo! We have talked,
God's grace, an hour and have not yet agreed.
Odo shall stay in gaol.

Anselm. My liege, take thought :
'Tis possible that Odo hath deserved
Severest censure, but is't now the time
To free so many arch-offenders, yet,
As though one more made difference, to pause
At one? To hesitate because that one
Provoked more private spite——

William (*fiercely*). Nay, that is false!

Anselm (*going right on, boldly but calmly*). What if men say, instead of praising thee,
"This king, a harsh man by necessity,
Learned so the habit of severe restraint
That on his death-bed, with a glorious chance
Of hallowing his reign by kindliness,
He spitefully made petty difference,
Bore malice to a bishop of the church"?

William. Anselm, 'tis not a gracious speech of thine.

Anselm. Sapientia dictata secus videtur.

William. Thou knowest, before all men, that I confessed,
Recounted all my sins, gave to the church,—
Thou knowest I have ever loved the church;
Thou knowest, too, I now act as I do,
Not out of private spite, nor yet because
I hold perverse to the end; thou art aware
That Odo, free, would set this realm on fire,

That any heritage with him abroad
Were better not inherited.

Anselm. My liege,
I think not of the consequence. This realm,
When thou art gone, will burst in turbulence,
Whether or not the bishop is set free.
I think only of thy fair name, of what
Men might well say: "This king, in ruling harsh,
Died with a Christian conscience clear, forgave,
Without a paltry quibble over whom,
All men that he had dungeoned."

Maminot. Hear, my liege!
The abbot doth speak wisely; heed his words.
How saith the Proverb? 'Tis a wise man's glory
To pass transgression by. Take thought, my liege.

[*A general murmur of assent.*

William (*after a pause*). Nay, an it pleaseth you,
I'll yield. 'Tis folly!
And I do prophesy that ill will come.
But you shall have him—write him in the list.

[*Anselm unrolls a parchment, goes over to table at side and writes; then returns and shows it to the king.*

Good. Now at least is thine own conscience clear.
(*After another pause*) My lords, our talk is done.
To-day no more.

[*As they rise to go, Clare comes forward.*

Clare. My liege, a boon. Thou saidst we had the right.

William (*laughing a little, then angrily*). No more to-day, Count Clare. What, still a boon!

Have I not granted all? To-morrow come,
Come to my funeral, if thou wilt, and beg.
My lords, you will retire. Only my sons
Wish I beside me in this final hour.

[*He puts out his hands, one to Rufus, one to Henry, and sinks back among the pillows. The others go out slowly. As they go, the* CURTAIN *falls very gradually.*

SCENE 4.

Time: The next morning.

Place: The same. The room has been dismantled and the bed stripped. William, dead, lies prone on the floor by the bed.

Enter cautiously a soldier and a monk. They do not at first see William.

Monk. Nay, this is grievous, so to spoil a king!
Men feared him through his life and fled from him,
But now, the terror gone, they crowd about
To desecrate the very chamber of his death.

Soldier. Those cowards knew him not — a kitchen-crew,

A swarm of stay-at-homes! If they had marched,
As some did, in his wars, their fear, I warrant,
Would have outlasted death. 'Tis past belief!

[*As he speaks the last words, the soldier looks about the dismantled room. The monk at this point suddenly catches sight of William's body, seizes the soldier by the arm, and draws him back. After a few moments' silence the soldier speaks.*

See, his features harden—grim and cold,
As they were wont to stiffen in his life
When he went forth to battle. In Scotland thus
He looked, and when he cheered us through the snows
To Chester; and at Senlac, I remember ——

Monk. Hush, man! Perchance his spirit passeth now.

[*Another silence, in which the two continue to watch the dead king.*

Monk (*as if to himself.*) Yet not quite Christian: too stern, too lonely;
He belonged to earlier times, to Northern Gods;
Even now he enters at Valhalla's gates
To sit at feast with Odin and his peers.

[*Another pause, during which the monk twice makes the sign of the cross.*

SLOW CURTAIN.

DATE DUE

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